

E. M. Forster: A Life

Volume Two

Polycrates' Ring (1914—1970)

P. N. FURBANK

ARNOLD-HEINEMANN

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For E. M. F

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Note on Unpublished Sources

Of the unpublished material drawn on in this biography, the greater part is in the possession of King's College, Cambridge (who own the copyright of all Forster's writings). Sources which have been used and which are not in the college's possession are listed below.

Letters from E. M. Forster (The present owner, when not the recipient, is indicated, where known, in brackets.)

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Also letters written by E M Forster as President of the National Council for Civil Liberties (University of Hull)

Memories of E M. Forster by Lady Faith Culme-Seymour

Talking About Morgan taped conversations of Robert and May Buckingham with Eric Crozier, recorded by Eric Crozier in 1971 (Mrs May Buckingham).

Taped Interview of E M. Forster with Quentin Bell, on the subject of Virginia Woolf (Quentin Bell)

Whichelo Family Scrapbook (Philip Whichelo)

Brief manuscript notes by William Plomer (P N Furbank)

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The notes for this book are divided into two categories. Those which appear on the page in question are indicated by numerals. The longer notes that appear at the end of the book are indicated by asterisks, and begin on p. 327

I Facing Facts

The outbreak of the 1914-18 war found Forster in disarray, irritated and driven in upon himself. He was doubly disturbed – by the war itself, and by the inadequacy of his own response to it. He felt sure, indeed, that it was an unjust and unnecessary war, and so did his Cambridge and Bloomsbury friends. There was a general feeling on the part of the Bloomsbury group that it was not *their* war, and that all they had stood for, the new age of tolerance and enlightenment inaugurated in G. E. Moore's Cambridge, was about to be destroyed. Almost all were pacifists of one persuasion or another – some, like Bertrand Russell, militantly so – and in the week or two before the declaration of war they had been busy in the neutralist and anti-war cause. The war bound 'Bloomsbury' together, more than before, as a conscious *élite* and for a time a much-hated one. Russell later recalled sitting in a bus, soon after the outbreak of war, and reflecting: 'These people would tear me to pieces if they knew what I think about the war.'¹

Forster, to the extent that he was a pacifist, was so by instinct rather than settled conviction. He was impressed by E. D. Morel and his Union of Democratic Control and distributed a few of the U.D.C.'s anti-war pamphlets, but his principal emotion was despair; he foresaw Britain handed over to all that he most feared – to panic and herd-instinct, to slogans and bogus 'cheeriness'. Nevertheless, for the moment he aligned himself wholeheartedly with his Bloomsbury friends. He guessed that there would have to be a 'sorting' of his friendships, and when his friend Malcolm Darling, in the Indian

¹ 'Some Psychological Difficulties of Pacifism in Wartime', in *We Did Not Fight*, ed. Julian Bell (1935).

Civil Service, wrote him a letter full of fire-breathing 'anti-Germanism, he feared for their relationship. 'I never would have been intimate with that pair if they hadn't been so sound about sex,' he reflected; 'and it's only a chance they are sound.' He wrote Malcolm a tart reply, meant also for his wife Josie's eyes, saying that Malcolm found in war what he had put there. Josie Darling came on a visit to England near the end of 1914, and she and Forster talked of the war. She thought him a 'dreamer' on the subject and challenged him to 'face facts'. 'Don't say "face facts" to me, Josie,' he answered, passionately. 'Everybody keeps saying it just now, but the fact is, it's impossible to face facts. They're like the walls of a room, all round you. If you face one wall, you must have your back to the other three.'

He pinned his hopes for the future, such as they were, upon friendship, as the sphere where decent feeling might survive. Recently he made a new acquaintance, with a schoolmaster named Lawrence Shuttleworth, a diffident and self-tormenting man, who, from some desire to 'test' himself, had enlisted as a trooper. Shuttleworth was eager for intimacy, and Forster, who feared for him, did his best to give it. They had an emotional conversation in the Café Royal, while Shuttleworth was on leave, in the course of which Forster said that it was not happiness one longed for but peace. Shuttleworth agreed.

Long silence – during which did I feel happiness or peace? Another day we parted. He said 'You've been very good to me.' I, 'I know I wanted to.' He nodded. I. 'It's outside the category of give and take.' – As a trooper he has come near something real – had no one beneath him, and loved not 'the poor when they're nice' but the poor. I'm convinced he will be killed at the war – it is almost assumed in all either says. Have never seen my self ennobled in anyone before ¹

Something of these feelings entered into a paper on 'Literature and the War' which he delivered to the Weybridge Literary Society near the end of the year, and subsequently at the Working Men's College. In his paper he argued that wartime was – as many were rightly saying – no time for reading; but it was a time for remembering what one had read, for learning more from great literature.

¹ ¹ Diary, 11 November 1914. Shuttleworth survived the war but committed suicide in 1925, a day after the death of his wife.

Literature does not teach us that War is either right or wrong, these are questions outside our competence – but she does teach us that hatred and revenge are wrong because they cloud the spirit. It is not easy to love one's enemies – for my own part I find it impossible – but one needn't be proud of not loving them, and she does exhort us to that much. Love is an emotion, hatred an excitement, and she is against excitement all along the line . . . Such seems to me her [literature's] function in war time. She helps us to abstain from fear and hatred, as far as our small minds will permit . . . Against all such hysteria the voice of the immortal dead protests . . . They have become one with Urania, the muse of Divine Song, who has given them not happiness but peace.

His lecture, printed in the *Working Men's College Journal* reached Rupert Brooke in the Dardanelles in March of the following year, and Brooke wrote irritably about it to his friend Ka Cox.

It's odd seeing what the chrysalises think. You see I'm in it, and the Ranee¹ (say)'s in it. But Forster's pathetically – where – on a hundred verges or behind them. But he seems far nicer than most of them, though pathetically – outside (The very point of war is that it brings out their exteriority – which they have everywhere, in the peace-fullest of 1913 luncheons and nightmares.) They're like nice and nasty children outside a circus, who alternately try to peep under the flaps and explain to each other how they despise circuses . . . he's nice about the soul of man. But ah! doesn't he suspect that the nobilities he whinnies for, come out more in war than in peace?

* * *

At the beginning of the war, Forster had decided that creation – that is to say fiction – was for the moment impossible for him. As a substitute, he resolved, in the autumn of 1914, to write a critical book on Samuel Butler. (He was perhaps encouraged in this by Forrest Reid, who had recently published such a book on W. B. Yeats.) Butler had long been an interest of Forster's. *Erewhon* he felt, was a book that he might have written himself; and in *Howards End* his handling of the money-theme, the Schlegel frankness about money that so shocks the Wilcoxes, owed much to Butler.² His interest had been quickened, too, when he met Butler's friend and biographer, Henry Festing Jones. Jones had written to him in praise of *Howards End* and had had 'incredible' things to relate about

¹ Family nickname of Brooke's mother.

² Mr Emerson in *A Room With A View* is probably partly based on Butler.

Butler¹ Edward Arnold was encouraging about his project, and in December Forster negotiated a contract for it, bargaining rather toughly – so much so that Arnold said he hoped he didn't feel he was being exploited. Forster noted coolly in his diary: 'I have not been straight with him [Arnold], but do not mind' For a little while the book interested him, but soon, in his words, 'a chill descended'. By June of the next year he had to tell Arnold that he was giving up 'in despair'.

His mother and he had taken in a Belgian refugee, a young man named Jules Quilley. He arrived at 'Harnham', their house in Weybridge, in November but did not last long, for Lily took against him, complaining that he ate up all the marmalade and never stopped playing the piano. After a few weeks Forster had to give him notice, at which Lily began to feel compunctious, Forster noted (15 December 1914) 'Mother interests herself in behaving well to Jules, while her heart harbours bitterness' He felt it was a fitting end to a 'galling, undignified summer', and in his New Year's Eve review he found few gains to record to set against the year's losses. Among the gains was a closer intimacy with Lowes Dickinson, whom he still met often in Cambridge or London. 'I have drawn him to me,' he observed, 'it is odd to exercise power upon one whom one respects, and, tiresomely, doesn't increase the respect. The war has shattered him and inspired little more than a whimper. He feels himself old. – All the same, we are on a basis of comradeship at last.' He had shown Dickinson his homosexual novel, *Maurice*, completed earlier that year, and, to his enormous relief, Dickinson admired the book hugely. There were one or two more gains, like his new friendship with Shuttleworth; but against them had to be set the loss of Masood, who had got married during the year. Forster acknowledged an end to this chapter in his feelings:

He never writes and I think of him seldom. There used never to pass a day. When I see him something, but not all, will revive. He stands at the close of my youth. I wish very much he had felt, if only once, what I felt for him, for I should have no sense of wasted time.

Early in the second year of the war, Forster's life received an unexpected enlargement. 'Oh my dear Reid, I have been in the most

¹ Presumably about his sex-life, which seems – in part anyway – to have been homosexual.

awful gloom lately,' he wrote to Forrest Reid (23 January 1915), 'and who do you think finally raised me from it? You will be so contemptuous of me ¹ D. H. Lawrence. Not the novels, but their author, a sandy haired passionate Nibelung, whom I met last Thursday at a dinner party. He is really extraordinarily nice.' The meeting had taken place at Lady Ottoline Morrell's. Lawrence was her latest discovery, and the dinner party had been to 'launch' Lawrence and Frieda. She had seated Forster and Lawrence together, and they had taken greatly to each other. Lawrence had monopolized the conversation; but Forster, when disposed, was an admirable listener, and he had found Lawrence and his views wonderfully attractive. He was, Forster had thought, so human, so personal, he *lived* his views, with none of that pose of detachment that bored him in Cambridge philosophizing. They had parted with the expectation of meeting again the next day, Duncan Grant having invited them and others present, to tea in his studio. Meanwhile Forster wrote to Lawrence, pursuing their dinner-table conversation, and repeating the answers which – so he complained – Lawrence had refused to listen to.

Lawrence and Frieda had recently moved to Greatham in Sussex, where Viola Meynell had lent them a cottage. Lawrence was in the process of systematizing his 'philosophy'. He had also, the previous autumn, drawn up the constitution of his Utopia, Rananim, and was on the look-out for recruits. He was thus, even more than usually, in a proselytizing mood. Forster, who had found him so endearing, saw a new side of him at their meeting in Duncan Grant's studio, when Lawrence began a ferocious tirade against Grant's painting. It rather alarmed Forster, who slipped away after a few minutes, murmuring excuses about trains. Lawrence, however, when he came to answer Forster's letter, was in a gentle frame of mind.

Dear Forster,

Don't expect any sort of answer or attention from me today, because everything is so strange & I feel as if I'd just come out of the shell & hadn't got any feathers to protect me from the weather. It is very snowy here, & rather beautiful.

Will you come down next week-end & stay with us? I think

¹ Reid was scornful of Lawrence, as he was of most contemporary writers apart from Yeats and Walter de la Mare.

nobody else will be here. As for my not listening to your answers, I've got a deep impression that you never made any.

I've only read one or two stories of yours, & should like *very much* to have the *Celestial Omnibus*.

This cottage is rather fine – a bit monastic – it was a cattle shed – now it is like a monks' refectory – the whole establishment is cloistral.

I'm glad you're not really Buddhistic – everybody said you were, I want somebody to come & make a league with me to sing the Chanson des Chansons – das Hohe Lied – and to war against the fussy Mammon, that pretends to be a tame pet now, & so devours us in our sleep.

But do come at the week end.

A weekend did not suit Forster, and he proposed coming some mid-week, meanwhile sending a copy of *The Celestial Omnibus*. Lawrence rejoined (28 January 1915) with a powerful homily, very definitely now suggesting a league between them and offering him membership of Rananim.

Very well, come when you can. I am so obsessed by this idea that you are always at the National Gallery,¹ like an attendant or a recording angel, that I can't conceive you free during the week. Come tomorrow or Monday or Tuesday or Wednesday or when you will – and stay one or two nights – as you will. Only let me know & say if you can walk 4 miles – & I'll meet you at Pulborough.

I don't belong to any class, now. As for your class, do you think it could tempt me? If I'm one of any lot, I am one of the common people. But I feel as if I'd known all classes now, & so am free of all . . .

In my Island, I wanted people to come without class or money, sacrificing nothing, but each coming with all his desires, yet knowing that his life is but a tiny section of a whole, so that he shall fulfil his life in relation to the whole. I wanted a real community, not built out of abstinence or equality, but out of many fulfilled individualities seeking greater fulfilment.

But I can't find anybody. Each man is so bent on his own private fulfilment – either he wants love of a woman, & can't get it complete, or he wants to influence his fellow men (for their good, of course), or he wants to satisfy his own soul with regard to his position in eternity. And they make me tired, these friends of

¹ Forster, at the outbreak of war, had taken a post as part-time cataloguer at the National Gallery. (See Vol. 1, p. 260.)

mine They seem so childish & greedy, always the immediate desire, always the particular outlook, no conception of the whole horizon wheeling round.

What do you want for yourself? You used to want the fulfilment of the natural animal in you – which is after all only an immediate need. So you made the immediate need seem the ultimate necessity – so you belied & betrayed yourself. I don't know where you've got to after Howards End.

Don't think this priggish & conceited I do feel every man must have the devil of a struggle before he can have stuffed himself full enough to have satisfied all his immediate needs, & can give up, cease, & withdraw himself, yield himself up to his metamorphosis, his crucifixion, & so come to his new issuing, his wings, his resurrection, his whole flesh shining like a mote in the sunshine, fulfilled and now taking part in the fulfilment of the whole.

So I feel frightfully like weeping in a corner – not over myself – but perhaps my own resurrection is too new, one must feel if the scars are not there, & wince, & one must see the other people all writhing & struggling & unable to give up.

How can there be a Celestial Omnibus? Is that satire? – like the spiritual perambulators of a parson I knew – 'All of you want wheeling to heaven in a spiritual perambulator' he said.

You are to take all this quite seriously.

There developed now quite a little imbroglio, for Frieda, in advisedly, had added a postscript. It ran:

This is a very angelic letter but I know the flapping of wings won't quite make you overlook the little twisted horns and the hoof – I thought you were 'good' to people – you listen so carefully, it frightened me, because so many things are said thoughtlessly – and you still listen with the whole of you – It is good of you. – I have only read your *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, & felt like turning somersaults and loved it – So you will come soon – I am quite miserable over the Brontë sisters that I am reading – How fond they were of each other.

Yours sincerely,
Frieda Lawrence.

A double act on the part of man and wife did not suit Forster, and he replied tartly, refusing to 'have dealings with a firm'. Nevertheless, he named a day for his visit (10 February) and lent them more of his books.

Letters returned promptly from both the Lawrences. Lawrence's own (3 February 1915) resumed the attack on Forster's life-aims:

. I have just read the Story of a Panic. You with your 'Only Connect' motto, I must say that you reach the limit of splitness here. You are bumping your nose on the end of the cul de sac.

My angels & devils are nothing compared with your Pan. Don't you see Pan is the undifferentiated root & stem drawing out of unfathomable darkness, & my Angels & Devils are old-fashioned symbols for the flower into which we strive to burst. Now no plant can live towards the root. That is the most split, perverse thing of all.

You see I know all about your Pan. He is not dead, he is the same forever. But you should not confuse him with universal love, as you tend to do. You are very confused. You give Pan great attributes of Christ.

All that dark, concentrated, complete, all-containing surge of which I am the fountain, and of which the well-head is my loins, is urging forward, like a plant to flower or a fountain to its parabola. And my angels and devils are a sort of old-fashioned flowering. I am just in love with medieval terms, that is all – & Fra Angelico & Cimabue & the Saints.

But your Pan is a stooping back to the well-head, a perverse pushing back the waters to their source, & saying the source is everything. Which is stupid & an annihilation – but very stupid. In these books, these last, you are intentional and perverse & not vitally interesting. One must live from the source, through all the racings & heats of Pan, and on to my beloved angels & devils, with their aureoles & their feet upon the flowers of lights, & with their red-mouthed despairs and destructions. However, we wait till you come. Don't be alarmed – I seem to 'stunt' because I use old terms for my feeling, because I am not inventive or creative enough.

Auf wiedersehen,
D. H. Lawrence

Frieda's letter (5 February 1915) was half-Lawrentian, half-diplomatic:

Thank you for *Howards End* – It got hold of me and not being a critical person I thank the Lord for it, and what he gives me. Only perhaps the end – broken Henrys remain Henrys as I know to my cost – It's a beautiful book, but now you must go further – We had violent discussions of your letters, L and I – (Three cheers for the 'firm') What ails you modern men is that you put too high a value on ready-made consciousness, on the revealed things, because you cannot utter the 'unutterable' you are inclined to say it does not exist – Hope and that sort of thing is *not* your strong point – You are so frightened of being let down, as if one couldn't

get up again! – As to the firm you *did* hit a little sore point with me – Poor author's wife, who does her little best and everybody wishes her to Jericho – Poor second fiddle, the surprise at her existence! She goes on playing her little accompaniment so bravely! Tut – tut, tra-la-la! Thank you again for Howards End, it had a bucking-up effect on me!

Yours sincerely,
die zweite Flöte
And come soon

Further messages¹ followed, and Forster reached Greatham pleasantly keyed up², expecting much and feeling that much was expected of him. He had come for three days, and during the first day, again found Lawrence enchanting. Lawrence took him for a long walk on the downs, talking³ brilliantly and feelingly about his childhood and family – every now and then breaking off to look at birds or to pick catkins. In the evening, the three painted bee-boxes,¹ which was the Lawrences' craze just then. 'A fascinating employment,' Forster wrote to Florence Barger (12 February 1915). 'You can be as post-impressionist or as virginal as you choose, and in any case all is over in an hour, and the design, if a failure, can be painted out in black, and recommenced.' He had brought a rumour that Boot's Library were refusing to supply Lawrence's *The Prussian Officer* and that Sir Jesse Boot, when pressed about it, sent subscribers a private copy in a special binding, so that they could see how disgusting the book was.² Lawrence raged at this and railed rather madly against 'respectability', but Forster felt much sympathy. 'I am getting awfully revolutionary in my old age,' he told Florence.

The second day turned out differently, for Lawrence was in a prophetic and denunciatory mood. He preached the need for a revolution, for the immediate nationalizing of industry, and the land, and the press. Then he began an attack on Forster, an interminable diatribe against his books, his philosophy, his whole way of life. In a way, Forster had been prepared for this, but not for the violence of it, which rather frightened him. He listened patiently, however, and when Lawrence insisted that, in order to come to life, he must change his whole existence, he merely asked, ruefully, 'How do you

¹ Boxes in which bees are transported.

² The ban, if it occurred, was probably motivated by anti-Germanism as much as prudery and may have looked forward to later police suspicions concerning the Lawrences' loyalty.

know I'm not dead?' Finally, after many hours of denunciation, he asked Lawrence if there were anything, anything at all, in his books that he could praise, and Lawrence, surprisingly, said yes, the character of Leonard Bast in *Howards End*.

It had been the confrontation that Forster had anticipated, and it left him angry but impressed, for he could see he counted for much in Lawrence's eyes, and he determined to be neither rattled nor conciliatory. Having heard Lawrence out – it was now late in the evening – he grasped his candlestick, muttering that he wasn't sure the Lawrences weren't 'just playing round his 'knees', and went to bed without saying goodnight. Lawrence liked this behaviour and wrote that night to his friend Barbara Low about him.

Forster is here. He is very nice I wonder if the grip has gone out of him.

I get a feeling of acute misery from him – not that he does anything – but you know the acute, exquisite pain of cramp – I somehow feel that. I think I must get it by transference from him. He is going away in the morning. We have talked so hard – about a revolution – at least I have talked – it is my fate, God help me – and now I wonder, are my words gone like seed spilt on a hard floor, only reckoned an untidiness there. I must tell you I am very sad, as if it hurt very much.

Next day (12 February 1915) he also wrote to Bertrand Russell:

We have had E. M. Forster here for three days. There is more in him than ever comes out. But he is not dead yet. I hope to see him pregnant with his own soul . . . He sucks his dummy – you know, those child's comforters – long after his age. But there is something very real in him, if he will not cause it to die. He is *much* more than his dummy-sucking, clever little habits allow him to be . . .

Forster . . . is bound hand and foot bodily. Why? *Because he does not believe that any beauty or any divine utterance is any good any more.* Why? Because the world is suffering from bonds, and birds of foul desire which gnaw its liver. Forster knows, as every thinking man knows, that all his thinking and his passion for humanity amounts to no more than trying to soothe with poetry a man raging with pain which can be cured. Cure the pain, don't give the poetry. Will all the poetry in the world satisfy the manhood of Forster, when Forster knows that his implicit manhood is to be satisfied by nothing but immediate physical action. He tries to dodge himself – the sight is pitiful.

But why can't he act? Why can't he take a woman and fight

clear to his own basic, primal being? Because he knows that self-realization is not his ultimate desire. His ultimate desire is for the continued action which has been called the social passion – the love for humanity – the desire to work for humanity

True to his determination to take the quarrel seriously, Forster, on his return home, wrote the Lawrences a tough and rather rude letter, saying he had not enjoyed his stay. Lawrence was hurt, telling Forster 'Some things you should not say in your letters', and Frieda tried her hand at conciliation.

Dear Mr Forster,

I have just read the book that came this morning – and I am still in the rotten hut of the decayed village where the last woman is crumbling to bits! And the boar with the big tusks coming in! It's grim, thank you for sending it – Your letter was not very nice – Of course you like us, even if you don't admit it. Neither L nor I are tout le monde, and what he preaches to you is just exactly what you say yourself in your books – But you are a suspicious person like Leonard Bast – Why? I have had such jolly conversations with you since you went, you weren't there to answer! No, you don't do L. or his work justice. God knows he is a fool, and undeveloped, but he is so genuine, a genuine force, inhuman like one also – and such a strain, but you ought to help him, he is really very inarticulate and *unformed* – Russell says of you, I expected great things of him – it makes me cross, they give up hope so soon, but it must be his own hopelessness that makes him doubt you – I felt you by no means dead and enjoyed your stay awfully and you ought to have enjoyed it more! Or have you the bad taste to prefer your Weybridge liter-society? I am sure you are a wonder to them and you are spoilt – very spoilt – And you are not to be suspicious – . . . L. is in London, so this is not a joint letter – I am *not* going to ask you to come again, you will have to come of your own free will – You are *not* to mind L's 'customs beastly, manners none'; think, I have to put up with them, and they have improved! I think you are both vile with each other, it was all the time on the brink of quarreling – watching each other like two tomcats! And there is the spring coming, and I feel so bruised and battered and I do so want to enjoy him (the spring) to the full! . . .

Lawrence, meanwhile, had inveighed to Lady Ottoline against Forster – or rather, against Forster's attitude to him, which he attributed partly to class-snobbery. She was excited, picturing herself in the role of peacemaker, and passed on Lawrence's complaint

to Forster, and he replied asking her to tell Lawrence that he did not despise him.

It's annoying enough that he should think this – it's worse he should think it's the contempt of the semi-detached villa for the cottage I've looked up to the class that produced him for many years now.

Lady Ottoline then invited them together to her house, and they quickly made up their quarrel, while, unaware of this, she wandered from one to the other saying it was 'so dreadful' that two such writers should quarrel, then sighing 'I'm making it worse.'¹

The friendship, in fact, had developed as far as it ever would. Lawrence wrote Forster no more long letters, though Frieda continued to, nor did he think any more of a 'league' between them. There was an incompatibility between them, partly to do with self-consciousness. Forster thought Lawrence too un-self-aware, or perhaps deliberately self-blinding. For one thing, or so Forster thought, Lawrence ignored his own homosexual side.² Forster wrote to Dent (6 March 1915) asking him if he had read Lawrence's *The White Peacock*.

If not, do not, for you cannot, but read one chapter in it called a Poem of Friendship, which is most beautiful. The whole book is the queerest product of subconsciousness that I have yet struck – he has not a glimmering from first to last of what he's up to.

The blindness made for absurdity in their own relations. There was something stupid in being told by Lawrence to come to Rananim with his 'woman'. In addition, Forster found Frieda rather much to swallow. And a further wedge was driven between the two when, at some encounter, Lawrence spoke offensively about Edward Carpenter. It made Forster 'realize, with regret, that I cannot know him [i.e. Lawrence].'

Lawrence remained in a way attached to Forster and curious about him. In June he sent Forster 'The Crown', his philosophical testament, saying 'I can trust you to take me seriously, and really to read. Because whatever I may be, you *do* listen.' And Forster,

¹ Letter from Forster to Hilton Young, 4 March 1915.

² Forster did not do Lawrence justice here; see the remarkable suppressed Introduction to *Women in Love* published in *Phoenix II* (1968), pp. 92–108.

for his part, continued to do various commissions for the Lawrences, buying drawing-paper for Frieda and canvassing orders for their bee-boxes (They were turning them to profit) In the autumn, when Hugh Meredith published a volume of poems, Forster sent Lawrence a copy, and on the strength of this Meredith paid Lawrence a visit in Hampstead. Lawrence was amused by his self-dramatizing manner, reporting to Forster:

He led off by saying 'I'm tired of language, both written and spoken' Of course, after that, what was to be done? I asked him to turn cart wheels in the passage, or to gambol & bark like a dog on the rug. But he didn't rise to the occasion

Then suddenly he appeared at eleven at night,¹ the same night, for no reason whatever, and we talked till one o'clock. He says he's going mad I say it's very undistinguished, because most folks are. We have a firework sort of conversation.

There's no earthly reason why he *should* go mad, except the important one, that he wants to.

To Meredith himself he wrote a letter in apocalyptic vein, ending:

One must try to save the quick, to send up the new shoots of a new era a great utter revolution, and the dawn of a new historical epoch either that or the vast amorphous dust. I can make nothing of the men, they are all dead. E M is dead *und schon verweste*. Perhaps the women - God knows, it is enough to send one mad.

* * *

The collision with Lawrence had one immediate effect on Forster; it made him determine to be more open in expressing feeling. Shuttleworth, one day when they were parting, said he thought he might commit suicide, and Forster answered him 'I'm not even here to tell you not to do that, but do realize that I love you.' Afterwards he reflected, 'It was my dressing down at the Lawrences that helped me to do this.' Similarly, it emboldened him to show *Maurice* to various friends, among them Dent, Forrest Reid and Lytton Strachey. Dent was enthusiastic, and Forster's confidence began to grow. 'You can scarcely imagine the loneliness of such an effort as this - a year's work!' he told Dent (6 March 1915).

¹ Calling uninvited was a Cambridge habit of Meredith's, which he practised till the end of his life. He would sometimes startle friends in Belfast by appearing at their house at breakfast-time.

How one longs for praise shamelessly! You have given me the greatest comfort and pleasure. I wrote it neither for my friends nor the public, but because it was weighing on me: and my previous training made me write it as literature . . . I am much dependent on criticism, and now, backed by you and some others, do feel that I have created something absolutely new, even to the Greeks.

To Reid he sent the novel with trepidation, fearing that he might be shocked, and, in fact the physical love-making in the novel, though shadowy, did shock him, or at all events did not suit him. Oddly, too, he claimed never even to have realized that Forster was homosexual. Forster was roused to defence of the novel:

I do want to raise these subjects out of the mists of theology: Male and Female created He not them Ruling out underdeveloped people like Clive – or your youth, whom you advised most rightly – one is left with ‘perverts’ (an absurd word, because it assumes they were given a choice, but let’s use it) Are these ‘perverts’ good or bad like normal men, their disproportionate tendency to badness (which I admit) being due to the criminal blindness of Society? Or are they inherently bad? You answer, as I do, that they are the former, but you answer with reluctance I want you to answer *vehemently*! The man in my book is, roughly speaking, good, but Society nearly destroys him, he nearly slinks through his life furtive and afraid, and burdened with a sense of sin You say ‘if he had not met another man like him, what then?’ What indeed? But blame Society not Maurice, and be thankful even in a novel when a man is left to lead the best life he is capable of leading!

Thus brings me to another point, and having gone bang at it, I will say farewell to sociology Is it ever right that such a relation should include the physical? Yes – sometimes. If both people want it and both are old enough to know what they want – yes. I used not to think this, but now do. Maurice and Clive would have been wrong, Maurice and Dicky more so, M. and A. are all right, some people might never be right.

I know very well that argument does little, but perhaps it clears the air – we see better than before where we are fated to dwell. I’ve a world of the spirit that touches yours in places, but it trails down into earthly desires where we are severed, and though they tether me I don’t even *want* to renounce those earthly desires. My defence at any Last Judgement would be ‘I was trying to connect up and use all the fragments I was born with’ – well you had it exhaustingly in *Howards End*, and Maurice, though his fragments are more scanty and more bizarre than Margaret’s, is working at the same job.¹

¹ Letter to Forrest Reid, 13 March 1915.

As for Lytton Strachey, Forster hardly hoped for his approval, knowing how little sentimentality, or at least his own version of it, was in Strachey's line. However, to his surprise, Lytton gave him high praise, mixed with some extremely sensible criticism

I enjoyed it very much indeed – I think really more than the others. The absence of the suburb-culture question was a relief. I wish I could talk to you about it – the difficulty and boredom of epistolary explanations is rather great.

Qua story, first – I thought it seemed to go off at the end to some extent. The beginning – especially up to the successful combination of Maurice and Clive – I liked very much. It appeared solid and advanced properly from point to point. The psychology of both excellent. The Maurice-Alec affair didn't strike me as so successful. For one thing, the Class question is rather a red herring, I think. One suddenly learns that Maurice is exaggeratedly upper-classish – one wouldn't at all have expected it on the face of things – and then when the change comes, it seems to need more explanation. No doubt his falling in love with Alec was possible, but it's certainly queer as it happens – partly because the ground isn't enough prepared, and Alec's feelings I don't quite seize. As you describe it, I should be inclined to diagnose Maurice's state as simply lust and sentiment – a very wobbly affair, I should have prophesied a rupture after 6 months – chiefly as a result of lack of common interests owing to class differences – I believe even such a simple-minded fellow as Maurice would have felt this – and so your Sherwood Forest ending appears to me slightly mythical.¹ Perhaps it simply is that the position isn't elaborated enough. The writing gets staccato (for the first time) at the end of Ch. xlv – just at the crisis 'Adamantine', too, can't be right.

This is my main criticism of the story – I wonder if you'll see anything in it. A minor point is that I find it *very* difficult to believe that Maurice would have remained chaste during those 2 years with Clive. He was a strong healthy youth, and you say that, unless Clive had restrained him 'he would have surfeited passion' (Ch. xv). But how the Dickens could Clive restrain him? How could he have failed to have erections? Et après ça – ? Well! I suppose it's just conceivable, but I must say I think you seem to take it rather too much as a matter of course.

I admire the cleverness very much. The opening scene with

¹ In the first version the novel contained an epilogue, set some years later, in which Maurice's sister Kitty encounters him, and the gamekeeper Alec still living happily together and working as woodcutters – the world well lost. Forster's friends united in finding it preposterous, and taking their advice he suppressed it.

Mr Ducie is very good, and his reappearance 10 years later. The upper class conversations and that awful household in the country – how can you do it? Then the ingenuity of the machinery – e.g. the piano-moving incident – seems to me . . . 'supreme'! I like enormously Alec's letters. Is it true that the lower classes use 'share' in that sense? – I must find out.

There remains the general conception – about which I don't feel at all certain. I don't understand why the copulation question should be given so much importance. It's difficult to distinguish clearly your views from Maurice's sometimes, but so far as I can see, you go much too far in your disapproval of it. For instance, you apparently regard the Dickie incident with grave disapproval. Why? Then, à propos of Maurice tossing himself off (you call it a 'malpractice') (Ch. xxxii), you say – 'He knew what the price would be – a creeping apathy towards all things.' How did Maurice know that? And how do you? Surely the truth is that as often as not the effects are simply nil. Also (Ch. xxxi) you describe Maurice's thoughts in the railway carriage as 'ill-conditioned' – which appears to me the sort of word Mr Herbert Pembroke would have used.

It almost seems that you mean to indicate that Maurice's copulating with Alec is somehow *justified* by his falling in love with him. This alarms me considerably. I find the fatal sentence inserted (Ch. xlii – British Museum) – 'he loved Alec, loved him not as a second Dickie Barry, but deeply, tenderly, for his own sake, etc.' More distressing still, there is never a hint afterwards that Maurice's self-reproaches during that period were exaggerated. I think he had still a great deal to learn, and that the très-très-noble Alec could never teach it to him. What was wanted was a brief honeymoon with that charming young Frenchman who would have shown Mr Eel that it was possible to take the divagations of a prick too seriously.

Another thing is – perhaps even more important – that you really do make a difference between affairs between men and men and those between men and women. The chastity between Maurice and Clive for the 2 years during which they were in effect married you consider (a) as a very good thing and (b) as nothing *very* remarkable. You then make Clive marry (without any change in his high-falutin' views) and promptly, quite as a matter of course, have his wife. (So that when he said to Maurice 'I love you as if you were a woman,' he was telling a lie.) I really think the whole conception of male copulation in the book rather diseased – in fact morbid and unnatural. The speechification by which Maurice refuses to lie with Alec on the last night – no! – That is a sort of self-consciousness which would *only* arise when people were *not* being natural. It is surely beastly to think of copulation on such

an occasion – shall we copulate? shall we not? ought we to? etc. – All one can think of is that one must embrace

I could write a great deal more – especially about 'the triviality of contact for contact's sake' – but it's too difficult, and I feel half the time that you have satisfactory answers. I wish we could talk. I hope to be in London before very long. I hope this critique isn't too much of a good thing, and will fit in nicely along with those of Bob Trevy, Waterlow and Hilton Young.¹

Forster replied that he found himself agreeing with Lytton more than he would have liked. And, writing to Dickinson (13 December 1914), he put his finger on a central weakness in the novel, its wish-fulfilment element, which lay deep in his whole motive for writing it.

I might have been wiser to let that also [the Alec Scudder part of the novel] resolve into dust or mist, but the temptation's overwhelming to grant one's creations a happiness actual life does not supply. 'Why not?' I kept thinking. 'A little rearrangement, rather better luck' – but no doubt the rearrangement's fundamental.

He was by now seeing a good deal of Strachey. He would go to stay with him at his cottage, The Locket, in Wiltshire, and sometimes Strachey would spend the day in London with Forster, visiting galleries. Strachey seemed to have revised his opinion of him, for the better; Forster pretended to wonder if it was senility. In September he went down to The Locket for a weekend, at a time when Strachey, not feeling he could face another country winter, was about to abandon Wiltshire for London. 'By a stroke of genius,' Lytton reported to his brother James, he got Forster to stay behind and pack for him, while he went off to visit other friends. Forster also cut his hair for him. 'Your hair was a real weight off me,' Forster wrote to him (27 September). They were now on very frank and comfortable terms, and during the weekend they had talked a good deal about *Maurice* and homosexual life. It gave Forster, afterwards, a twinge of apprehension, and he warned Strachey: 'Oh, but do *not*, by the way, reveal aught of me to the Lady O. [i.e. Ottoline], whom I regard as a very high explosive, nor indeed to anyone.'

* * *

His links with 'Bloomsbury' had grown stronger. He had got on to friendly, if not intimate terms, with Virginia Woolf, and when her

¹ Letter to Forster, 12 March 1915.

novel, *The Voyage Out*, was published in the spring of 1915, he reviewed it in the *Daily News*, hailing it as a masterpiece. The book had chimed with his wishes for his own fiction, his desire for something more visionary, less restricted by satire and 'suburban' comedy. He wrote in his review. 'Human relations are no substitute for adventure because when real they are uncomfortable, and when comfortable they must be unreal. It is for a voyage into solitude that man was created.' Virginia Woolf, desperate for reassurance about her work, as she always continued to be, was profoundly grateful for his praise and from now on became very dependent on his opinion. He intrigued her as a person, too. She was impressed by his penetration and vision, and amused by the contrast between them and his old-maidish way of life. 'I saw Forster, who is timid as a mouse, but when he creeps out of his hole very charming,' she wrote to Margaret Llewellyn Davies (21 August 1915). 'He spends his time rowing old ladies upon the river, and isn't able to get on with his novel.' She liked him a good deal – rather more than, in his heart, he liked her. Throughout their friendship, which lasted till her death, he felt the need to be on his guard with her. 'One waited for her to snap,' he put it later. In the course of the last two years she had had several serious spells of insanity, and during her convalescence after one of these, Leonard Woolf invited Forster to lend her *Maurice*. He found an excuse for refusing.

* * *

The war, and the war-fever, weighed on him. In the May of 1915 he developed chicken-pox and was plunged into 'one of the simpler forms of war-malady', able to think of nothing but young men killing one another while old men praised them. He sent the Darlings the current war-gossip, about Zeppelin-raids and submarines, but, he told Josie Darling (20 June 1915), England was seeming to him 'tighter and tinier and shinier than ever – a very precious little party, I don't doubt, but most insistently an island, and there are times when one longs to sprawl over continents, as formerly'. Malcolm asked for his opinion of Rupert Brooke, whose death at Gallipoli in April had stirred so much patriotic emotion. His answer (2 August 1915) was sympathetic but debunking.

You ask about *Rupert Brooke*. Considering we were on Christian names terms, I did not know him well, though enough to contradict the legends that the press are weaving round him. He was

serene, humorous, intelligent and beautiful – as charming an acquaintance as one could desire – and latterly most friendly. But he was essentially hard: his hatred of slosh went rather too deep and affected the eternal water-springs, and I don't envy anyone who applied to him for sympathy. The sonnets, on which his reputation is evidently to be based, differ from all his previous work, which was rebellious and unorthodox. They were inspired by his romantic thoughts about war, not by his knowledge of it: that also, had he been spared to gain it, he was hoping to express, and, knowing his grim and grotesque realism, I feel sure that he would have expressed something besides the Holiness in which – to me so inappropriately – his work concludes. I don't know whether the above conveys anything to you. If it errs on the side of unkindness he himself wouldn't like it the less, for he was extraordinarily free of conceit and sincerely desired to be done by as he did. But he goes down to posterity as a sort of St Sebastian, haloed by the Dean of St Paul's, and hymned by the Morning Post as the evangelist of anti-Germanism. As far as I dare speak for Rupert, how he would hate it, or rather laugh at it.

From time to time he received pinpricks over his failure to enlist, or to do something more like 'war-work' than cataloguing paintings at the National Gallery. Mrs Beveridge, mother of his old school-friend William,¹ wrote lecturing him on his lack of public spirit. Her interference enraged him, and Lily much more so, and he replied breaking off relations with her. Nevertheless, he felt uncomfortable and began to consider some kind of non-combatant work at the front. G. M. Trevelyan suggested he join an ambulance unit in Italy, and he pondered this for some weeks. Then, in the autumn, a better suggestion arose, which was that he should go to Alexandria as a Red Cross 'searcher'.

The system of hospital 'searching' – that is to say, interviewing the wounded in hospital for information about fellow-soldiers reported 'missing' – had originated with Lord Robert Cecil, who had formed a group for the purpose in the early days of the war. The Red Cross had taken up the idea, setting up bodies of voluntary searchers in all the main theatres of war; and with the Dardanelles campaign, Alexandria had become a busy centre for this work. Forster obtained an interview with Gertrude Bell, who was recruiting 'searchers'. She was somewhat snubbing, seeming not to want to take him; and, piqued by this, he proceeded to pull every string he

¹ See Vol. I, p. 38.

could - a useful one being Percy Lubbock, who worked in the Red Cross 'Wounded and Missing' Bureau 'I am leaving no stone a gentleman may turn to be sent to Egypt as a Searcher by the Red Cross,' he reported to Virginia Woolf (17 October 1915) 'Miss Gertrude Loathly Belle was greatly against me, but I do fancy is silenced at last.' Lubbock managed matters successfully, and a fortnight later Forster, wearing Red Cross uniform, embarked from England for Egypt expecting to be gone for three months.

2 Alexandria

With the war, Egypt had assumed great military importance for Britain. It was the supply base for the Dardanelles campaign, and a quarter of a million troops were stationed on its soil for the defence of the Suez Canal. Till then, Britain's position in Egypt had been very anomalous. For thirty years or so the British Consul-General had been the effective ruler of the country, yet formally speaking he had possessed very little power – no more than his French counterpart – and the country had still nominally been part of the Turkish Empire. It was only with Turkey's entry into the war, on the German side, that Britain had declared Egypt a protectorate, proceeding to depose the Khedive and replace him by a puppet Sultan.

Egypt, in fact, tended to be regarded as a rather second-rate part of the Empire. The British officials did not much like the place, nor – since the Denshawai incident of 1906¹ – were they much liked; there was little fraternization, on their part, either with the native Egyptians or with the cosmopolitan commercial and official classes. Even Lord Cromer, the so-called founder of modern Egypt, thought it a 'nondescript' place and considered the idea of its ruling itself as absurd as 'the nomination of some savage Red Indian Chief to be Governor-General of Canada'.²

Forster had been excited at the prospect of seeing Egypt, but at

¹ In June 1906 there was an affray between villagers at Denshawai, in the Delta, and a party of British Officers on a pigeon shooting expedition, one of the officers being murdered. The very severe reprisals – four of the accused Egyptians being executed – provoked much anti-British feeling.

² Letter to Lord Salisbury, quoted by the Marquess of Zetland in *Lord Cromer* (1932), p. 165.

first sight he too found it a disappointment. The landscape, as seen from the train window, seemed to him 'a feeblar India, as flat without the sense of immensity'. And as for Alexandria 'One can't dislike Alex,' he wrote to his mother soon after arrival, 'because it is impossible to dislike either the sea or stones. But it consists of nothing else as far as I can gather. just a clean cosmopolitan town by some blue water.' In fact, though he was to have important experiences in Egypt and was, in one way or another, to write a good deal about it, he never learned to love it or Alexandria. His standard was India, and Egypt – the 'semi-East' or 'pseudo-East' – struck him as a parody of it. The feeling had grown definite in a letter to Masood, written a few weeks later (29 December 1915)

I do not like Egypt much – or rather, I do not see it, for Alexandria is cosmopolitan. But what I have seen seems vastly inferior to India, for which I am always longing in the most persistent way, and where I still hope to die. It is only at sunset that Egypt surpasses India – at all other hours it is flat, unromantic, unmysterious, and godless – the soil is mud, the inhabitants are of mud moving, and exasperating in the extreme. I feel as instinctively not at home among them as I feel instinctively at home among Indians.

The phrase 'mud moving' reappears in the opening paragraph of *A Passage to India* as an evocation of India – albeit of the dreary Chandrapore ('The very wood seems made of mud, the inhabitants of mud moving'). Mud, the mud of the Nile, and moral 'muddiness' were always to figure in his vision of Egypt. And in this and other ways his experience there was taken up into his Indian novel.

On arriving in Alexandria, he reported at once to the head of the Wounded and Missing Department, a Miss Victoria Grant Duff, daughter of a sometime Governor of Madras 'a youngish, slightly shrewish lady,' Forster wrote of her to his mother, 'slightly distinguished and quite friendly and considerate.' His duties, as explained by her, included daily searching in the wards of the various hospitals, and the compiling, each evening, of a report – which might be quite lengthy – for forwarding to the London Office. As a voluntary worker he had 'officer' status and was expected to find his own lodgings, so, for the moment, he put up in a hotel, being kept company there by another searcher, the historian D. A. Winstanley. There were two more full-time searchers (as well as part-time helpers), but he gathered from

Winstanley that, 'through debauchery and age', they did not do much, and the bulk of the work would fall on themselves and Miss Grant Duff. The searchers, apart from their daily report, could organize their work as they liked. The amount of it depended on the arrival of convoys, and for the first week or two Forster found himself kept very busy.

He took to his Red Cross work and, before long, decided he was good at it. He found himself doing a good deal beside strict 'searching' - he would play chess with the patients, take their watches to be mended, write their letters for them and act as unpaid solicitor (It was a sort of serviceableness he enjoyed). He was impressed by their lack of vindictiveness towards their Turkish adversaries. 'We fought every bit as dirty as what they did,' one said. Most of them were cynical about the fight for King and Country. He listened endlessly to their stories of war-horrors and, sporadically, compiled a collection of them.

Pte. in the Herefords spoke of a dead Australian who was in the way when they were making a parapet, so they cut him at the neck and knees and fired through him.

Private Davies 1/7 Royal Scots told me yesterday this.

A Turk was mining and with a boulder they smashed the ladder down into his hole so got him. They were about to shoot but their officer went out of his mind and insisted they should bury the Turk alive instead. 'Bit too bad being buried alive' said the man in the next bed. 'I shouldn't mind being shot.'

(A man who saw report of his own death.) He was a chap who was a regular comic and he said 'Well I never knew it before - I'll go and lie down.'

Pte. Young 8 Mans., after giving careful evidence for 20 minutes without reproof. 'I never like anyone to ask me about it - it leaves a bad taste in the mouth. I think of the days again, of the days again.'

Our heroes Sgt. Corrigan, Sussex Yeomanry. 'I often quarrel with myself as I lie here - don't quarrel with any one else - think of the foolish things I've done. Enlisting! King and Country. God's trewth! I'll watch them! I don't want to go into battle anymore. No place for me. They throw things at you and don't even say they're sorry.'

Miss Grant Duff praised his reports and told him that he was by far the best of her searchers. He also saw one of his reports reprinted by Lord Northcliffe in his book *At the War* as an example of the

'labour of love' by which the Red Cross were 'easing the sorest wounds of warfare'

As soon as he had reached Alexandria, Forster had got in touch with an old King's acquaintance, Robin Furness,¹ who ran the Press Censorship Department. Furness was a close friend of Sheppard and Keynes: a very tall, elegant, sardonic man, learned about the poets of ancient Alexandria and with a line in extravagant bawdry.² He had a large and cosmopolitan acquaintance in Alexandria and introduced Forster among it, in particular to a Greek businessman, Pericles Anastassiades, a Syrian named George Antonius, and an elderly English major, Sir Bartle Frere. Pericles Anastassiades was an aesthete and amateur painter. He engaged Forster to give him English lessons (English being the fashionable language in the Greek community), and through him and Furness, Forster began to hear of, and before long met, the poet Cavafy, who was an old friend of Anastassiades'. Antonius worked in Furness's Censorship Department, later becoming a leading Arab nationalist and opponent of Zionism.³ Forster struck up quite a friendship with him and sometimes, later, went for holidays with him, he liked him more than he trusted him, never knowing, as he said, 'which pair of back stairs he would next run up'. As for Sir Bartle Frere, he was, Forster told his mother, 'a kind, cultivated, unassuming, distinguished, aristocratic old gentleman, but oh! oh! oh! such a bore'. Sir Bartle became much attached to Forster, considering his jokes so witty that he would write them down to send to his sister in Gloucestershire. Through Furness and his friends Forster was also put up for a club, the Cercle Mohammed Aly – a smart and cosmopolitan establishment, with gaming-tables at which there was high play.

Another friend to whom Furness introduced him was Aida Borchgrevink, the widow of a Norwegian judge. She was American by birth, the daughter of 'a corn-king', and before marriage had

¹ Sir Robert Allason Furness (1883–1954).

² He wrote to Keynes from Alexandria, 25 April 1907: 'I have long been a policeman or inspector of police in this disorderly town: daily I feed my disgusted eyes on drunken Welsh governesses and stabbed Circassian whores; I peer into the anus of catamites, I hold inquests upon beggars who die and are eaten by worms . . .'

³ George Antonius (1891–1942). He acted as secretary-general to the Arab delegation at the Palestine Conference in London in 1939 and through his book *The Arab Awakening* had considerable influence on British policy.

trained as an opera-singer.¹ Furness had a passionate platonic relationship with her; indeed, in a sense, she had been the 'making' of him, and the polyglot group of workers in his Censorship Department were largely of her recruiting. She was an ebullient, romantic woman, who sang Wagner at the top of her voice as she drove. (Miss Grant Duff, who had a crush on her, used to address her as 'O Ocean Wave'.) She took a great fancy to Forster, whom she insisted on calling 'Rickie', and as her house, in the fashionable eastern suburb of Ramleh, lay on his daily route, it was arranged that he should take his lunch in her garden. She would leave fruit and cold drinks in the summerhouse, and he in return would leave a folded paper on the tray, containing a poem, a joke, or something of the sort. Her daughter used to encounter him in the garden and recalled him as a 'very pale, delicately-built young man, slightly towzled and very shy, with a habit of standing on one leg and winding the other round it.' Mrs Borchgrevink also subscribed to the 'shyness' theory and would tell her daughter how this shy young man would drop the oddest, most unforeseen remarks into the conversation. Hearing that he was in uncomfortable lodgings, she found him a flat with a former maid of hers, an Italian-speaking Greek named Irene. Irene owned two houses, and was always moving from one to the other, and when she did, she would take Forster with her. 'Lo porto con me' she would say; it made him, he said, feel like a doll.

Three months came and went, with no suggestion of his returning; nor had he any desire to return. Alexandria, prosaic, slightly debased, and less hag-ridden by the war than England, suited his mood. The weather was exquisite; he had taught himself to swim; and he was busy and useful. 'I am here become cheeriness itself and run from one little deed of kindness to another all the day,' he told Leonard Woolf (12 February 1916).

Little lists, little reports, little men – why are wounded soldiers so short? – then dinner in a little Italian restaurant & so to bed. The weather is perfect, the tennis courts of the Sporting Club thronged by day, the brothels by night . . . Invalids – opinions – and between them a bottomless abyss. There you have it in a nutshell as the 119 Generals would say.

¹ She was baptised 'Ada', adopting the name 'Aida' after attending a performance of Verdi's *Aida* during her honeymoon.

In June, however, his peace of mind was shattered. Three months before, the Government had introduced conscription, rescinding an earlier scheme under which men of military age were invited to 'attest' for future service, and, reacting to this, the Red Cross decided to release its able-bodied members for army service. The right to 'attest', thereby avoiding conscription proper, was due to expire in late June, and Forster was instructed to present himself for a medical examination before this, on the understanding that, if passed fit, he would 'attest'. He was horrified, and furious at what he thought a breach of faith, however, seeing no escape, he went for a medical inspection, having secured an undertaking that it would commit him to nothing, and expecting anyway to be classified as unfit. To his consternation, however, the new doctor reported him as suitable for active service. He was now in a serious dilemma. He was determined not to attest, yet could not easily explain his reasons – for he knew that, in a strict sense, he was not a conscientious objector. For a few days he was badly thrown by the contretemps, and – as once or twice later in life in times of stress – he developed a kind of falling sickness and had bouts of hurling himself against the furniture. His friends, luckily, were all on his side. And, bolstered by them (by Antonius in particular) he recovered and began half to relish a fight with authority. He wrote politely to the Chief Red Cross Commissioner, Sir Courtauld Thomson, asking to be excused from attesting, on conscientious grounds, and pointing out that, had he returned to England, he could have put his case to a tribunal. Sir Courtauld responded simply by sending a clerk to him with an attestation form, instructing him to report with it to the army within two hours. At this, Forster demanded and obtained an interview. When Sir Courtauld asked him his objections to attestation, he replied that they were not religious: he did not condemn anyone who joined the services – indeed, he considered them his superior. It was a matter of instinct, 'a very profound instinct which he could only call conscience and which presented the taking of the life of a fellow-creature as the most horrible thing he could do'. Sir Courtauld asked him to leave the room while he consulted, and on Forster's return said, unpleasantly, that conscientious objectors could not be considered at all. 'I see – they no longer exist?' said Forster, which made Sir Courtauld flush. They argued further; and eventually he obtained after all a grudging permission to return to England to

attend a tribunal By now his friends were very busy on his behalf, concerting plans to obtain him another medical examination Miss Grant Duffy greatly disliked conscientious objectors but, illogically, made an exception for Forster and urged his claims so vigorously to army friends that a high-ranking officer intervened with Sir Courtauld, telling him the army positively did not want Forster 'I am quite shameless over this wirepulling,' Forster wrote cheerfully to his mother (10 July 1916)

If I can't keep out of the army by fair means then hey for foul!
 Let alone that there conscience I know I should be no good, and
 haven't the least desire to pacify the parrots who cry 'All must go.'
 One will lose a certain amount of friends of course, mainly female,
 and incidentally the approval and support of Uncle Horace¹

The boat which was to take him to England was delayed. And eventually, perhaps because of the friendly attitude of the army, the 'attestation' affair died down and was forgotten

For Forster – though he did not realize the fact – it had a curious sequel On 29 July 1916 he had written to Masood, recounting the recent drama, also reporting that he had recently had a letter from the Maharaja of Dewas inviting him to come to India to be his private secretary In his letter, he had used the free, affectionate style he always adopted with Masood. It ran

Dearest S R M.,

I have a long unfinished letter to you somewhere. I remember the chief points – (1) I had been dreaming of you and longed to see you – indeed woke up in the night to write. (2) I was telling you how much I disliked the Egyptians and how inferior to the Indians I have found them, both in charm, intellect and morality Now what shall I tell you in this letter? My longing to see you remains, but I grow frightfully pessimistic, frightfully. First the war must end, then freedom to travel must be re-established, and God knows how long this will take. I have had a long cable from Dewas asking me to be his Private Secretary and Right Hand. I should have accepted in normal times, partly because it would have given me the chance of seeing you. But it is impossible to leave the Red X at present As it is they tried to hoof me into the Army, a disaster that I have hitherto avoided. I hope I shall be medically unfit, but they take everyone who isn't actually diseased I fancy. Except

¹ He disliked his uncle Horace Whichelo, considering him bullying and overbearing. See Vol. 1, pp. 26–7.

for my nerves, which have got bad (chiefly owing to this enlistment worry) I am looking and feeling pretty fit . . .

Now where are you? I heard of the Hyderabad scheme back in England and am interested it has come off ¹ I loved the glimpse of Hyderabad I saw – also the Bidar work I got there. (You can give me a present of more if you like) I loved the smells in the scent bazaar, and the Mosque and the Sagar on whose slot we picnicked by moonlight. It is nice to think of you among those things. Here there is only the pseudo-East – the pretentious, squalid, guttural Levant – and I shut my eyes to it on purpose, lest it spoil my pleasure in the true East, to which I shall one day return . . .

Much love, dearest Boy.

Morgan.

The letter was intercepted by the postal censor in Bombay, who was scandalized by it and forwarded it to the Bombay political department, remarking:

I took up a letter by the same writer to the same addressee last year to Special Officer The letter was passed into the post. It was much of the same type as the present one, only it showed up the writer still more as a decadent coward and apparently a sexual pervert. I think the Political Secretary, Government of India, should see this letter as the writer does not seem to be fit to be employed in Dewas.²

The matter was referred to the central administration, in Simla, and the following exchange ensued:

The Hon'ble Mr J. B Wood, C.I.E , I.C.S , Political Secretary to Govt. of India, Foreign and Political Department, Simla to O. V. B. Bosanquet, C.S.I , C.I E., Agent to the Governor-General in Central India, Indore; 24 August 1916.

I send herewith a copy of a letter from Jukes with enclosures, which explain themselves. You will notice that the man Forster says that he has a cable from Dewas asking him to be his Private Secretary and Right Hand. It might be as well to ascertain which Dewas is referred to, and possibly to give him a hint that Forster is not altogether a desirable person.

¹ Through the efforts of his English friends, Masood had been diverted from the law, which he disliked, and which they thought politically dangerous, into education, obtaining the headmastership of a school in Patna (a post hitherto reserved for the British) and then becoming Director of Public Instruction in the state of Hyderabad.

² This, and the ensuing correspondence, are to be seen in the India Office library.

Bosanquet to Wood, 28 August 1916

The intercepted letter . . . is from a man whom the Raja of Dewas, Senior Branch, was proposing to engage as his Private Secretary.

He is a novelist of some repute, who made the acquaintance of H.H. when he was travelling in India some time ago. He is evidently a poor creature, but Luard¹ who has met him thinks there is no foundation for the suggestion that he is a sexual pervert.

He declined the Raja's offer of an appointment, as he says in his letter, and we shall take steps to see that it is not renewed.

Forster's letter was allowed to proceed, and no whisper ever reached his ears of the stir that it had caused. Whether a word was spoken to the Maharaja is not clear; if it was, it had no effect.

* * *

As Forster's letter to Masood shows, he found it hard to like Egypt and the Egyptians. He, of course, knew hardly any Egyptians personally, there being almost no social contact between the alien 'upper classes', whether Greek, Turkish, French or British, and the indigenous community. Thus the dislike was largely an aesthetic not a personal one, but it disturbed him. He told Darling (6 August 1916)

I came inclined to be pleased and quite free from racial prejudice, but in 10 months I've acquired an instinctive dislike to the Arab voice, the Arab figure, the Arab way of looking or walking or pump shitting [*sic*] or eating or laughing or anything – exactly the emotion that I censured in the Anglo-Indian towards the natives. What does this mean? Am I old, or is it the war, or are these people intrinsically worse? Any how I better understand the Anglo-Indian irritation though I'm glad to say I'm as far as ever from respecting it! It's damnable and disgraceful and it's in me.

He had in fact got to know one Egyptian, an official in the Police Department, and with him he had an experience that seemed to him 'pure mud'. They had been to visit a hashish 'den', a sight which Forster was curious to see, having already visited an opium den in Lahore. Such 'dens' were illegal, but were generally run by aliens, so – under the Egyptian system of extra-territoriality² – they were

¹ Lt-Col C. E. Luard, an official in the political department and a distinguished archaeologist. He was a friend of Lowes Dickinson.

² One of the legacies of Turkish rule in Egypt was a system by which, by means of what were known as 'capitulations', Europeans in Egypt enjoyed extra-territorial rights.

not under police jurisdiction, indeed, not being able to at first find a 'den', Forster and his friend had asked help from a policeman, who had directed them to one kept by a Maltese. Forster described the visit in a letter (18 May 1916) to Edward Carpenter, who took a sociological interest in such matters.

We went up pitch black stairs in a slum and scratched at a door at the top 'No haschich here - hardly know what the word means etc.' We push in, and find a small and well mannered company smoking the drug, quiet and langorous. There was also an Arab girl, barefoot, very young and tired, and some boy attendants, playing cards together - not to speak of odd noises in unopened rooms. One of the boys made a sign to me. I did not respond, but he came and sat down by us on the bench. He was a young man really, of extraordinary beauty and charm, very big and well built and manly, despite delicacy of lip, and softness of eye. He wore garabia and tarboosh and wouldn't talk Italian and I no Arabic. The other boys - in European dress and less charming - also made signs. Every one - except ourselves - smoked. I would have smoked if I had been alone, but my friend, whom I knew very slightly, seemed puritanical, and we rather damped the evening. Three clients - dapper young men in straw hats, probably Italian shop assistants - came in and were horrified at our sight. Boys tried to sit on their knees, but they were not having any at all, and after drawing at the pipe once or twice went quietly away, as if this was all they had come for - Well, with due regard for the censor, I have now indicated what was to me an interesting and even attractive evening. I felt curiously at ease in that haunt of vice, and didn't even realize I was behaving priggishly till afterwards. So perhaps I wasn't a prig really. However, no matter whether I was a prig or not. What matters is that I should give you first hand information. I hate, tho', to think of that young man immured in that den, for though haschich doesn't make people unpleasant it does rot them, there's no doubt, and youth can pay too heavily even for aphrodisiac power and the annihilation of time and space!

A few days after his visit, Forster learned from Furness that the Maltese proprietor of the 'den' had been reported to his consular authorities. He mentioned this to his Egyptian friend, to whom he was giving dinner, and to his astonishment, the Egyptian told him he had lodged the complaint himself. 'Oh yes,' he had said, smiling modestly, 'it was my duty. I am private gentleman in the evening but a member of the administration by day. I keep the two apart.'

Of the various nationalities in Alexandria, Forster came to the conclusion that he most liked the Greeks. 'There are other escapes – the Syrian, the Italian, the Bedoun etc. – but I prefer the Greeks,' he told Bob Trevelyan (6 August 1917).

. the Greeks are the only community here that attempt to understand what they are talking about, and to be with them is to re-enter, however, imperfectly, the Academic world. They are the only important people east of Ventimiglia – dirty, dishonest, unaristocratic, roving, and warped by Hellenic and Byzantine dreams – but they do effervesce intellectually, they do have creative desires, and one comes round to them in the end

The Syrians dance

The Bedouns lay eggs

The French give lectures on Kultur to the French

The Italians build il nostro Consolato, nostro Consolato nuovo, ricco, grandioso, forte come il nostro Cadorna, profondo come il nostro mare, alto come il nostro cielo, che muove l'altre stelle, e tutto vicino al terminus Ramleh Tramways¹

The English have witnessed 'Candida' or 'Vice Detected'.

His greatest discovery among the Greeks was the poet Cavafy. Cavafy was now in his early fifties. His parents had been Greeks from Constantinople, his father having been partner in a firm of wheat and cotton exporters, with branches in London and Alexandria. During the 1850s and 1860s the Cavafys had been leading members of the Greek community in Alexandria, living in style in the fashionable new Rue Chérif. With the death of Cavafy's father in 1870, however, the family fortunes had rapidly declined, the firm shortly afterwards going bankrupt; thus the poet and his brothers had been brought up with a feeling of vanished glories and lost status. At the time of the family ruin, Cavafy had been at school in England. He was, in consequence more or less bilingual,² and on the strength of this he had, in 1892, obtained an ill-paid post as a civil servant, in what was called the 'Third Circle' of the Irrigation Department. It was a post he retained for the rest of his career, though – sharing the family feeling of being above work – he was never very industrious.

¹ 'Our Consulate, our new, rich, magnificent Consulate, strong as our [General] Cadorna, deep as our sea, lofty as our heaven that "moves the other stars", and quite convenient for the Ramleh Tramways terminus.'

² He spoke Greek with a faint English accent, and the Cavafy critic Robert Rowe has suggested that he 'thought' his poems in English

(An office-colleague has given a nice account of his ruses to conceal his late arrival from his British employers. 'He never used the lift, so as not to be scolded for being late. He climbed the stairs thoughtfully, ready to give some sort of justification if he were seen. What bothered him was his hat . . . sometimes he tried to get rid of it, or use it as an alibi. If he happened to meet one of the messengers when he arrived, he gave him his hat to hang up in his office before he himself came'¹) At the time of entering the British service, he was still living with his mother, whom he adored. After her death, in 1899, he had for a time shared a flat with his brother Paul, a society journalist, and when Paul had had to flee the country to escape his creditors, he had continued in the flat alone. It stood in the Rue Lepsius, a rather seedy street, otherwise mainly occupied by prostitutes and known among his English friends as the 'Rue Clapsius'.

He had been writing poetry from early years and in the early 1900s had published two pamphlets of verse containing one or two of his finest poems, including the famous 'Candles', and 'Waiting for the Barbarians'. It was not till 1911, however, that he felt he had perfected his true manner. The year represented a dividing-line in his career. He began then a new method of publishing his verse, distributing his poems one by one in the form of broadsheets or offprints, to a chosen circle of readers, for them to collect in folders; and about the same time he began to write more outspokenly on the subject of homosexual love. Since then, his fame as a poet had spread; and by 1917, when Forster got to know him, he was much discussed in literary circles in Alexandria, and to a lesser extent in Athens, though still totally unknown in non-Greek-speaking countries.

In person he was withdrawn, deliberate and rather over-polite in manner, and totally preoccupied with his own work and reputation. In his essay 'The Poetry of C. P. Cavafy',² Forster described how, after their first introduction, they would from time to time meet in the street. He would hear his name called out, in accents that seemed not so much to be greeting him as simply registering the fact of his existence. He would turn and would discover Cavafy, 'a Greek gentleman in a straw hat, standing absolutely motionless at a slight

¹ See Robert Liddell, *Cavafy* (1974), pp. 128-9.

² In *Pharos and Pharillon* (1923).

angle to the universe.' If the poet was going to his office, he would then disappear with a gesture of despair; but if he was on his way home, he might converse. He would begin an enormous, labyrinthine sentence, dealing with 'the tricky behaviour of the Emperor Alexius Comnenus in 1096, or with olives, their possibilities and price, or with the fortunes of friends, or George Eliot, or the dialects of the interior of Asia Minor', and before it had reached its conclusion Forster might find himself on Cavafy's doorstep or inside his flat. The flat was dark, with heavy Moorish hangings and elaborate carved candle-brackets, and was crammed with family furniture; outside in the passage there always stood a large garden-chair, chained to the wall. During one of his early visits, Forster questioned Cavafy about his poetry, but Cavafy replied, discouragingly, 'You could never understand my poetry, my dear Forster, never.' Despite this, they looked together at 'The City', and Forster, with his scraps of public-school Greek, managed to grasp some of it. At this, Cavafy's interest in him rose. 'Oh but this is good, my dear Forster,' he exclaimed, 'this is very good indeed.' From then on they often talked about the poems, sometimes in the company of a friend of Cavafy's, George Valassopoulos, who was making translations. Cavafy was a man of rituals, and when the conversation flourished, he would jump up every now and then to light more candles. His own talk was mainly soliloquy. He would be caustic about his fellow Greeks. 'Aristocracy in modern Greece?' he once remarked to Forster. 'To be an aristocrat there is to have made a corner in coffee in the Piraeus in 1849.' For himself, he liked to be called a 'Hellene' rather than a Greek. 'Never forget about the Greeks,' he said to Forster, 'that we are bankrupt. That is the difference between us and the ancient Greeks, and, my dear Forster, between us and yourselves. Pray that you - you English with your capacity for adventure - never lose your capital, otherwise you will resemble us, restless, shifty, liars. . . .'¹ The vision that informed his conversation, a disbelief in racial purity and high valuing of 'bastardy' in civilization, fitted perfectly with Forster's own mood of the time, and he felt that in Cavafy he had found the epitome of Alexandria

* * *

As the days went on, Forster began to find his 'searching' duties monotonous. Nevertheless he performed them conscientiously, and

¹ Quoted by Forster in a letter to Christopher Isherwood, 16 July 1933.

sometimes, as well, he would lend a hand in hospital entertainments. He worked up a lecture on ancient Alexandria, which he gave here and there to patients, with varying success. He also gave piano recitals and helped organize concerts of classical music. At one of these, at the Montazah Convalescent Hospital, he acted as master of ceremonies and felt pleased at the way he quieted several hundred catcalling troops. He wrote to Carpenter (23 April 1917):

It was great fun quieting them down, and trying to talk sense about music instead of that damned superior art patronage; and I believe I was able to talk sense and quiet them because I loved them. They behaved perfectly through the programme and most of them stopped to the end. We had violins, tenor, and solo-piano executants all first class. I can't help swanking over this concert. I felt that I had been burrowing under rubbish and touched something that was alive and had been trying to touch me. It is useless trying to touch something you don't want to touch. that is why all attempts to 'improve' people are vain.

He had himself convalesced from jaundice at Montazah and had come to love the place, often returning there for weekends. The hospital was in the Khedive's erstwhile palace and stood among tamarisk groves and oleanders, overlooking a bay where the patients bathed naked. This Edenic atmosphere, he felt, was just made for him. He wrote to Lowes Dickinson (28 July 1916):

It makes me very happy yet very sad – they come from the unspeakable all these young gods, and in a fortnight at the latest they will return to it: the beauty of the crest of a wave. I came away from that place and time thinking 'Why not more of this?' Why not? What could it injure? Why not a world like this – its beauty of course impaired by death and old age and poverty and disease, but a world that should not torture itself by organized and artificial horrors?

From time to time, in the hospitals, he struck up a friendship with a soldier. Normally the acquaintance did not last, for the patient would soon return to his unit, but in one case something more enduring developed. This was with a young ship's steward, Frank Vicary. (It was a friendship that, later, would cause Forster a good deal of worry.) Vicary was a country boy from Herefordshire and before enlistment had worked as a cider-maker. He was small, vivid, rather gaunt and hollow-cheeked, but with bright blue eyes. He was an odd, independent character, with unexpected turns of phrase, and

quite widely read in a self-taught way. when Forster met him he was reading William James. Their first meeting was in July 1916 Forster was leaving his bedside, saying 'I know you're in the Navy, so we won't have much to say to each other,' when Vicary, out of the blue, exclaimed 'I'm awfully interested in ideas - I'm more interested in ideas than anything' 'So am I,' said Forster, and sat down on the bed again, whereupon Vicary talked charmingly and amusingly. He told Forster of his first encounters with religion: at home, he said, they had believed all one's cut toenails were resurrected on the Last Day - though whether re-attached or in bags his grandfather could not decide. Forster and he saw each other often in the next few weeks, and when he was shipped home, the two agreed to write, and to meet again in England.

Admirable though Forster had found Alexandria as an escape, it had brought him no release from sexual frustration. He was attracted by Vicary but could see no hope of a response there, nor could he from any of his acquaintance. He wrote lamentingly to Carpenter (12 April 1916):

Dear Edward, you continue the greatest comfort. I don't want to grouse, as so much is all right with me, but this physical loneliness has gone on for too many months, and with it springs and grows a wretched fastidiousness, so that even if the opportunity for which I yearn offered I fear I might refuse it. In such a refusal there is nothing spiritual - it is rather a sign that the spirit is being broken. I am sure that some of the decent people I see daily would be willing to save me if they knew, but they don't know, can't know. I sit leaning over them for a bit and there it ends - except for images that burn into my sleep; I know that though you have heard this and sadder cases 1000 times before, you will yet be sympathetic, and that is why you are such a comfort to me. It's awful to live with an unsatisfied craving, now and then smothering it but never killing it or even wanting to. If I could get one solid night it would be some thing.

However, a change was approaching in his sexual fortunes. In October he had a casual escapade with a soldier on the beach. It was his first full physical encounter, and he did not enjoy it greatly - not so much because he found it squalid, as because it was so anonymous. He reported it to Florence Barger, remarking 'It is as if (in the novel) A[lec] had been ordered to come and then dismissed at once.'

Something more important was to follow. From time to time, on

the Ramleh tram, he had noticed the conductor, a young, slightly negroid-looking Egyptian, and had felt faintly attracted. It struck him how carefully the young man threaded his way through the passengers, not trampling on their feet as was the general custom. Once, too, he observed him laughing with a soldier, and, as the two parted, holding one after another of the buttons on the soldier's uniform, as a kind of farewell – it struck him as rather charming. Then, one cold night as he was returning by tram to Irene's, the same conductor politely asked him to get up, as his coat was under Forster's seat. Forster was equally polite; and from now on, when they met on the tram, they half saluted each other. It was still nothing at all; but one evening the following March (1917), when Forster proffered his fare, the Egyptian said earnestly, 'You shall never pay! If you do not want that piastre in your hand, throw it into the road, or give it to some poor person as a charitable action I will not have it.' Forster, perplexed, inquired why, and the conductor reminded him of the coat incident – he said he had not expected so much courtesy from an Englishman. Forster was greatly intrigued and took the same tram next evening, and again on the following one, hoping to see him, though without success, and before long he was spending hours every evening at the tram-stop. Eventually the desired tram and conductor appeared. He got on, the two chatted, and Forster offered a cigarette, receiving the reply, 'I seldom smoke – my Ministry of Finance does not permit it.' At this Forster, scenting a request for a tip, made an awkward little scene, insisting on paying his fare and making the conductor keep the change. The young man closed his fist, so that the coins scattered, and both had to get down on their knees to retrieve them. When at last the conductor, sulkily, had pocketed them, Forster said brightly: 'Now you can buy an English book.' 'The sum is too small,' answered the Egyptian coldly.¹

Soon after this, the conductor saved Forster further loitering at tram-stops by telling him his hours; and now they frequently met and chatted. One day the Egyptian said to Forster: 'I want to ask you a question, which please answer truly, sir. Why do English people dislike Mohammedans?' 'They don't,' said Forster, with a twinge of

¹ It is noticeable that the offering and rejecting of money also figured in those two important incidents of Forster's early life, the occasion when he was sexually molested as a schoolboy and his encounter with a lame shepherd-boy in Wiltshire. See Vol. 1, pp. 37 and 116–17.

guilt. 'They do, because I heard one soldier say to another in the tram, "That's a mosque for fucking (I beg your pardon) Mohammedans!"'

'They were joking, I think '

'You think - you are not sure.'

'No, I am sure. One of my greatest friends is a Mohammedan. I went to India to see him '

'That must have cost a great deal of money With what you spent seeing your friend you could have bought many friends in England. You can get friends if you have money' except one or two.'

'But I enjoyed the travelling.'

'You would have been better employed at home making some useful invention, I think.'¹

Their running dispute over Forster's fare ended in a crisis. One day an Inspector found Forster without a ticket and questioned the conductor, who made up some story that Forster was authorized to travel free. There was a violent altercation, in Arabic; and when finally the Inspector alighted, the conductor told Forster he was to be dismissed. 'But that's too awful, too appalling,' protested Forster. 'Why so? I have performed a good action,' said the young man, with dignity; adding, to make conversation, 'Please answer me a question. When you went to India, how many miles was it?' 'I don't know or care!' cried Forster. 'Whenever shall I see you again?' The conductor said, doubtfully, that perhaps they could meet one evening, if Forster would wear civilian clothes.

Forster was now much keyed up and went next day to Furness for advice. By good fortune Furness knew the Manager of the trams, who was under an obligation to him, and by mid-day he could report that the matter of the fare could be arranged. He was nervous, however, and urged Forster not to pursue the friendship - advice which Forster decided to ignore. He went to seek out the conductor with his good news, and the Egyptian, convinced that Forster had been to see the Manager himself, thanked him gravely. Forster once more asked if they could meet some evening. He replied, 'Any time, any place, any hour!' and they arranged a rendezvous at the Nouzha Gardens, on the outskirts of the city.

¹ This dialogue, and much of the detail of what follows, was recorded by Forster in a long 'letter' addressed to this Egyptian friend after the latter's death.

The Egyptian was there at the appointed time, smartly dressed and self-assured, and they found a bench Forster, still imagining that bribes and gifts were required, had come furnished with chocolate and a large bag of sticky cakes. The Egyptian nibbled at these with disfavour (he told Forster later he thought they might be drugged) and remarked, 'I do not care for cakes. What did you pay for them?' Forster said he couldn't remember. 'No? How many centuries ago did you buy them? Next time you will put me to a similar expense.' Forster quoted the Greek proverb that 'The possessions of friends are in common,' but the Egyptian received this cynically. A little while later, he said, with a plunge: 'Would you like to see my Home of Misery? It will be *dreadful*.' This entailed a lengthy tram journey, and the Egyptian, forgetting his disapproval of the cakes, amused himself by handing them round among the passengers.

His room was very poor and bare, but they squatted on the bed and chatted amicably. The Egyptian told Forster his name, Mohammed el Adl, and one or two more facts about himself – that he had been born at Mansourah, a town in the Delta, and had learned English at the American Mission school. His parents were still in Mansourah – 'But I have always ate apart and lived apart and thought apart. Perhaps I am not my father's son.' Then, with another odd plunge, he insisted on showing Forster all his possessions, even turning out the contents of his trunk, exclaiming as he did so: 'Very little, but all clean!' Forster thought this a good omen. As they were parting, the Egyptian said, 'This is the very happiest evening of my life.'

They met again soon at the Home of Misery, and Forster met some of Mohammed's friends – a Syrian midwife, and a young Egyptian who ran a matrimonial agency – conversing with them in Italian. As he left, Mohammed said gravely, 'I have the honour to ask your name,' and Forster told him, though not what he did for a living.

On the next occasion, Mohammed came to Forster's room in Ramleh. They played chess and lay on the bed, and after a little while, they leaned towards each other and began to stroke each other's hair. Mohammed murmured, 'Beautiful hair,' and they kissed. Things now went wrong, for Forster, growing excited, made too fierce a grab at Mohammed, and there was a scuffle, during which Forster hurt his hand and Mohammed hurt his eye. It was not a serious quarrel, and next day, encountering on the tram, they compared their injuries and laughed.

Their next meeting, in the Home of Misery, was a more serious crisis, for Forster got it into his head that Mohammed was trying to insult him. He rose to leave, in a fury, glaring angrily at Mohammed. Mohammed, puzzled, said, 'What do you expect me to tell you?' – to which Forster replied, 'Let us be friendly when we meet on the trams, but we can never meet outside again.' His anger soon cooled. It was, he wrote to Florence Barger, 'curiously like Maurice towards the end of the book. I have found it so hard to believe he was neither traitor or cad' Soon after this Mohammed was summoned to Mansourah, where his mother was dying. Forster, on his return, treated him with great gentleness and understanding, and this cemented their friendship. From now on it was understood that they would meet regularly.

Mohammed had a talent for friendship and found the right approaches with Forster. For one thing, from the start, he addressed him as 'Forster', which struck the desired note of comradeship; Forster first took it for naiveté, then came to the conclusion it was conscious tact. For another thing, Mohammed steadfastly refused gifts, so that Forster began to lose his embarrassment over money. His riches and Mohammed's poverty became a standing joke between them. Mohammed would take hold of Forster's sleeve, which was grubby, saying, 'You know, Forster, though I am poorer than you, I would never be seen in such a coat. I am not blaming you. No, I praise you. But I would never be seen so. And your hat has a hole, and your boot has a hole, and your socks have a hole. . . .' Forster would promise improvement, but Mohammed would say, no, clothes were an infectious disease, 'I had much better not care, and look like you, and so perhaps I will – but not in Alexandria.' They discussed the British character, and Mohammed, who on his tram had suffered many rudenesses from the British, was tolerant, holding that some British were good and others bad. Just about this time he had a fracas with a British officer. Mohammed had asked him either to get *on* the tram or off it, at which the officer had hit him with his cane. Despite this he remained not ill-disposed to the British.

They were not able to meet very often. And, to complicate matters, Forster's landlady, Irene, seemed to disapprove of Mohammed – when she first saw him in Forster's room she gave a little scream. It made Forster feel he could no longer have Mohammed to his flat; and then a brother came to stay with Mohammed, so they had no

privacy in his room either. All that was left them was the public resorts, and they would meet at one or other of these once or twice a week. Mohammed was very accommodating, and agreed it would not be wise for them to be seen together too often.

For some time, he refused to go to bed with Forster. 'Never, never!' he exclaimed on one occasion: then he turned Forster's head away, saying 'I want to ask you a question. Do you never consider that your wish has led you to know a tram-conductor? And do you not think that a pity to you and a disgrace? While answering my question you are not to look at me.' Eventually he relented; and from now on, from time to time, they found the chance to spend a night together. Forster's happiness was now complete, and he determined to be grateful for his good fortune. 'Wish I was writing the latter half of *Maurice*. I now know so much more,' he told Florence Barger. 'It is awful to think of the thousands who go through youth without ever knowing. I have known in a way before, but never like this. My luck has been amazing'

It was the realization of all his secret ambitions. He had, or so he felt, broken through the barriers of class and colour; and this had been the fruit of courage and persistency – of that 'athletic love', or taking trouble over relationships, which he had often preached. 'It isn't happiness,' he wrote to Florence Barger (1 June 1917); 'it's rather – offensive phrase – that I first feel a grown up man.'

I felt the crisis coming just as I felt that very minor and grotesque episode coming last year. – This isn't a superstitious expression: it means that you feel faculties developing in you to grasp anything that comes. The practical difficulties – there is a big racial and social gulf – are great but when you are offered affection, honesty and intelligence with all that you can possibly want in externals thrown in (including a delightful sense of humour), you surely have to take it or die spiritually.

Florence was thrilled by the romance and responded to his weekly letters with ardent advice; and other friends in England, like Dickinson, Carpenter and Lytton Strachey, wrote applaudingly. 'Your situation sounds all that could be wished,' Strachey told him; 'though I suppose you may suppress the drawbacks. And perhaps you exaggerate the Romance – for my benefit – or your own.' Forster longed for a confidant to talk to, but there seemed none in Alexandria. Furness, the likeliest choice, still seemed alarmed and unwilling to be

involved. Indeed, Forster felt he was no longer such an object of interest to his friends, like Furness and Mrs Borchgrevink, as he had been at the time of the C O. affair. Partly for this reason, he began to feel alienated from his own class, 'Our table manners remain identical, but little else,' he told Carpenter (22 July 1917); and in a letter to Dickinson (5 May 1917) he gave him what he called a 'helpful tip':

You can remain a patriot if you will become a snob. Realize that the lower class, not the middle, is the typical Englishman, and you can love our race without difficulty. Officers, stockbrokers, politicians, grocers – they run us, but they are not England numerically, and their self righteousness is not our national characteristic. Shuttleworth¹ and I have decided to be snobs. We shrink, consciously, from such people, just as they shrink unconsciously from the lower class whom we love. We want to pretend we shrink from no one. But it's no good. Middle class people smell.

Mohammed earned a miserable wage on the trams, two shillings or so a day, and Forster decided he must help him find a better job. He made cautious inquiries among his friends, cursing the fact that he could not be more open, but could hear of nothing in Alexandria. Eventually, however, Furness, who had been moved to Cairo, found an opening for Mohammed with the army in the Canal Zone. It was a species of low-level 'intelligence' work. Mohammed was cynical when he heard of it: 'In other words, I am to be a spy?' However, he could hardly refuse, nor did Forster feel he could ask him to. Thus the fact had to be faced that they would be separated, and in war conditions there was no telling when they might meet again. They planned a farewell holiday, but were balked of this too, and late in October Mohammed left for the Canal.

* * *

Just about the time of Mohammed's departure, a quarrel developed between Forster and Miss Grant Duff. Usually he was skilful at avoiding quarrels, or settling them by a swift manoeuvre, but once or twice in his life a quarrel got out of hand, and then, for a time, it quite obsessed him. It did so on this occasion. Up to now, he and Miss Grant Duff had got on admirably. This war-work was her first job, and she took it with great seriousness and had frequently hymned Forster's praises as her one truly faithful assistant; he suspected, in

¹ Lawrence Shuttleworth (see p. 2) had been stationed in Alexandria for a few months, and Forster and he had met.

fact, that she was a little in love with him. Now, however, the London office, which also thought highly of his work, wrote giving him general control of the searchers in Alexandria and Cairo, with powers of appointment and dismissal. He was gratified, welcoming a change from 'searching'. Miss Grant Duff, however, spoke of it as 'a slap in the face'; she threatened resignation and at once set herself to thwart him all she could in his duties. He tried his best to avoid an open quarrel, knowing his over-reaction to quarrels, moreover, he was sorry for her. Thus, for some while they conducted a silent battle. She would open official letters addressed to him and answer them and would keep the searchers' reports to herself, meanwhile, as he told his mother, he 'acted like a perfect gentleman', pretending to notice nothing. To escape from her, and to console himself for Mohammed's absence, he took some leave, going to visit the Nile temples and the Pyramids, but on his return matters were as bad as ever. At this, he proposed to the Red Cross Commissioner that he should give up his new powers, or at any rate exercise them under Miss Grant Duff's direction. A meeting between them was arranged in the Commissioner's office, and Miss Grant Duff, on hearing the proposal, murmured frostily, 'Kind!' She was not placated, however, and went on exactly as before. Forster also discovered that she had given up her own searching. He attacked her over this, receiving a confused reply; and for some weeks afterwards she refused even to speak to him, wincing and biting her lips when their paths crossed. By now Forster felt quite ill with anxiety and irritation. It had aroused his latent misogyny, and he wrote to the London office, demanding to be rescued from Miss Grant Duff by whatever means. The authorities took his side, and letters came back from Percy Lubbock, reprimanding her and giving him total support. Even after this, though, the affair dragged on for several months, and Miss Grant Duff, though now more or less idle, would still haunt the office 'with the air of Iphigenia or Jeptha's daughter'. Forster felt enraged and saddened. 'She is only one of thousands whose characters have fallen to pieces during the war,' he told his mother. 'She is of course in great pain - a tragic figure, but I have suffered too much from her to feel any pity. My sensations with regard to her have all dried up.'¹

¹ She was, in truth, a tragic figure. After the war she lingered on in Egypt and fell on hard times. She spent her remaining money on a racehorse, and would lead it about on a string, smelling strongly of the stable herself, once,

In Mohammed's absence, he occupied himself writing for the local press, in particular the *Egyptian Mail*. The articles made a hit with the British community – probably, he told R. C. Trevelyan in a letter, because they were too facetious. There was 'Our Diversions', a series about the films, concerts and concert-parties of Alexandria; 'Gippo English', 'Handel in Egypt', about a local performance of *The Messiah* (for him, the quintessence of sentimental Englishness in music); and 'Royalty', a satirical account of a visit by the Sultan of Egypt. When Pericles Anastassiades took him to visit the Bourse, he wrote up the experience in an article, 'Cotton from the Outside':¹

'Oh Heaven help us! What is that dreadful noise! Run, run! Has somebody been killed?'

'Do not distress yourself, kind hearted sir. It is only the merchants of Alexandria, buying cotton.'

'But they are murdering one another, surely?'

'Not so. They merely gesticulate.'

'Does any place exist where one could view their gestures in safety?'

'There is such a place.'

'I shall come to no bodily harm there?'

'None. None.'

'Then conduct me, pray . . .

In March of 1918 he was, for the first time, taken flying, by an acquaintance in the Royal Flying Corps, named Eversden,² and this, too, provided copy for an article.³ Eversden, who was a religious man, told Forster that the experience would 'take the sarcasm out of him'; and, in fact, as well as amusing and scaring him, the flight filled him with delighted awe.

And this was flying, this was what scientists had aimed at and poets dreamed of for centuries. Even Shelley never flew . . . How is it possible to describe that reality to people who have never left the earth? I think it is not possible. There is nothing mystic in aviation, but no earthly pleasure resembles it. It has opened a new kingdom of material beauty . . .

to test a theory that iron shoes were cruel, she had horseshoes fitted to her own shoes. Eventually she was kicked by the horse and died of her injury.

¹ Reprinted in a volume of his Egyptian writings, *Pharos and Pharillon* (1923).

² He had once been secretary to Oscar Browning.

³ 'Higher Aspects' (*Egyptian Mail*, 5 May 1918).

For all this, it remained true that he did not respond to Egypt imaginatively, and in compensation he withdrew, in imagination, into a vision of ancient Alexandria. He gradually formed the plan of writing a book about it (eventually published in 1922 as *Alexandria: a History and a Guide*) in which he would reconstruct 'an immense ghost city'. He began to read widely in histories of the Ptolemaic and Christian periods and to reconstruct the topography of the ancient city. Practically nothing remained in the way of monuments, at most a few ruined walls and cisterns and a tall classical column known as 'Pompey's Pillar'; even the outlines of the harbour had changed, through silting. Thus, much had to be done by guesswork and by inference from the modern street-plan, and he spent his off-duty hours peregrinating the streets, sometimes in the company of an elderly friend, G. H. Ludolf. Ludolf was an official in the Post Office, who did part-time searching, he knew the city well and got Forster the *entrée* to places, such as mosques, normally closed to visitors. Meanwhile Forster read about Plotinus and Philo, and the controversies of Athanasius and Arius, receiving encouragement and reading-lists from Cavafy, who had constructed his own 'ghost city' of Alexandria. 'I am reading about Philo and the logos at present,' Forster wrote to Florence Barger:

Philo's god is in a great predicament. He can only say I AM – no he can't even say that – can't speak or be spoken to (like a servant who has given notice). Just undiluted amminess. Under these circumstances the thought occurs to him to create a useful fetch-and-carry called the Logos. Adam and Eve next come into being, learn to say, among other things, HE IS, and God is well pleased.

The enterprise gripped him increasingly, he was 'touring in time', he told Florence Barger, 'since space is a military zone'. He wanted to get it 'lucid and dignified', he wrote to Reid; 'the spirit of a procession is to inform it, if so I can contrive.'

He was weary of the actual Alexandria, but every now and then added a new friend, of one nationality or another, to his little circle. He got to know a Jewish lawyer and theosophist, named Leveaux, sometimes giving talks to Leveaux's Theosophical Society; also an Italian composer called Terni,¹ with whom he would go bathing. (Terni was or had been a Wagnerian, and they sang *Leitmotive* to

¹ E. Terni. He published an atonal quartet in 1925.

each other under the water.) Leveaux passed on to him a young English acquaintance, Robert Sencourt,¹ and Sencourt took rooms in the same house and for a time saw a good deal of Forster. Forster read him some of his abortive Indian novel, which Sencourt thought 'the most amusing satire on Anglo-India that had ever been written.' Sencourt, however, criticized certain descriptive passages for 'incompetent management of sound', recommending Forster to read Stevenson on the art of writing. Forster, he recalled, was a little taken aback, 'but seemed to feel there might be something in the idea'.

At about the same time, Forster also saw something of E. K. ('Francis') Bennett,² his friend from the Working Men's College. Bennett, a gentle, benign and vulnerable man, loathed the army (He told Forster his fellow-recruits had pissed in his boots.) He was indeed, for the moment, in great gloom, though was shortly afterwards, in Jerusalem, to receive a kind of revelation.³ Forster, so far, thought him rather uninteresting, a 'kindly vegetable'. Nevertheless, he confided in him about Mohammed, and, after Bennett had left for Palestine, he received from him 'a most beautiful and affectionate letter'. He had never dreamed there was so much in Bennett, and thereafter, for the rest of their lives, the two were close friends. 'He's got *creative* unselfishness,' Forster wrote of him, 'as opposed to the "never mind me" unselfishness, which springs from idleness and lack of vitality.'⁴

* * *

Forster had come to feel that the war would never end, or that if it did, human nature would take centuries to recover. He sent Dickinson (5 May 1917) what he called his 'Notes on Human Nature Under War Conditions':

When a man makes a statement now, it seldom has any relation to facts or even to what he supposes to be the facts. He is merely functioning – generally under the stimulus of fear or sorrow
Realize this, and he will puzzle you less

Most men are unhappy and restless without Faith, and, to cover up the path that led them to it, give out that Faith is splendid

¹ Robert Sencourt (1890–1969), biographer and critic.

² See Vol. 1, p. 176

³ He recorded it in *Built in Jerusalem's Wall* (1920) published under the pseudonym of Francis Keppel. The chapters were dedicated to various friends, including Forster.

⁴ Letter to G. H. Ludolf, 8 May 1920

and arduous and only fully attained by the elect. They can most agreeably believe in an enlarged and everlasting man. Hence 'God' in the past and the 'Nation' now. Either is the reflection of man, weakness upon a cloud.

It is easier to personify an enemy-nation than one's own, owing to one's greater ignorance of the items that compose it. Only by believing in a Germany have we become patriotic, just as we remained religious only so long as we could believe in a Devil. A menace essential to Faith . . .

Privately most men attain to love and unselfishness and insight and a priori one would expect them to display these qualities in their social life, for they certainly bring earnestness of purpose to it. But some psychological hitch takes place, whose nature is not easy to determine: could it be removed we should be free from all evils except disease and death. An observer from another planet who watched not only the earth's wars but its public institutions would never infer what sweetness and nobility there can be in intercourse between individuals.

Dickinson had spent the war in black despair, ostracized by some of his old friends in Cambridge because of his pacifism, and deliberately isolating himself from others.¹ Forster did his best in his letters to comfort him but admitted to his own 'hard little theory' – that all rational and philosophic effort towards a good society was futile. 'But then,' he told him, 'I have never had the energy or intelligence to understand contemporary civilization, have never done more than loaf through it and jump out of its way when it seemed likely to hurt me.' In so far as he saw hope for the post-war world, it was along the lines of Bertrand Russell's *Principles of Social Reconstruction* (1917). He recommended it to friends as a 'brave and splendid book', but to Russell himself he wrote (28 July 1918) that the book, with its faith in social progress, left him unconvinced.

For a time I thought you would shake me out of my formula – that though of course there is a connection between civilization and our private desires and impulses and actions, it is a connection as meaningless as that between a word and the letters that make it up. But the formula holds. The war will only end through exhaustion and nausea. All that is good in humanity must be sweated and vomited out together with what is bad.

¹ He told C. R. Ashbee, when Ashbee was going off to Egypt in 1917, that he was not envious and wanted to stay in Britain to feel the hideousness of things to the very full.

Some time during 1917 he received a letter from Siegfried Sassoon, a letter of homage and desire for friendship written out of the stress of Sassoon's disgust with the war. (It was during this year that Sassoon published his anti-war *Soldier's Declaration* and flung his M.C. ribbon into the Mersey.) The letter impressed Forster – he told Sassoon later that it had 'wound him up' when he had run down. A correspondence developed; and in the following year, when Sassoon (who by now had rejoined his regiment) was returning from Palestine, they made an attempt to meet. It was frustrated, and, next day, Sassoon wrote to Forster from the boat:

1 May 1918

Dear Mr E.M F ,

I am awfully disappointed because I have been unable to go ashore, we came straight on board from the train; the last Division who left here for France behaved so badly that we are not allowed to leave the boat – licentious soldiery! It is indeed a disaster that two eminent authors must be so cruelly isolated!

But, if you could see the officers' smoking room an hour or two after dinner, you would understand that there is a reason for these restrictions on liberty.

When I see a large number of officers herded together with facilities for enjoying themselves I simply loathe them as a class. The quiet ones sit in corners and are absolutely swamped by the odious vulgarity of the remainder.

I wish I had your power of reproducing conversations. A novel dealing with the bad side of the officer class in wartime would add something to the indictment against militarism. There are several generals and their staffs on board, – fairly quiet, but most of them look like tailor's advertisements. One hears them talking in their superior, self-possessed voices – 'I myself think . . .', 'My own opinion is . . .', and so on . . . But 'red tabs' always 'get my goat' as the troops say. The troops! I wish you could see them asleep on the decks at night, with a few violet, dim lights glowing overhead. They are crowded and overcrowded – many more than there is room for. And their patience & simplicity make me hate being an officer. But the troops are the only thing in the war that moves me deeply. When I see them in large masses they seem like the whole tradition of suffering humanity. They are like a single soul. Officers are merely nasty individuals who drink cocktails all day, and are touched by 'Because', 'The Rosary', & 'I Hear You Calling Me', & read 'The Tatler' & 'The London Mail', & put their own comfort before anything else . . .

Forster, equally disappointed, replied (2 May 1918):

Dear Sassoon,

Damn you. I suppose for writing such a letter and for not being ill. I settled when I saw the Ras el Tin postmark that you were in hospital there and that I should come to see you. How one longs for people to be ill. It's a great disappointment to me that we shan't meet. I have read those 4 poems. I like possessing them. I am writing for more of you to England.

I began a short story about officers.¹ It is called 'Inferior'. Two of them take cigarettes round their men in a Hospital, and come across a man whom one of them had shot at for 'cowardice'. But it was an inferior story. It's not that I'm off writing, but I can't any more put words between inverted commas and join them together with 'said' and an imaginary proper name. The atmosphere of the story, had it attained one, was exactly what your letter describes, though the officers only got their Rosaries and Cocktails as the curtains fell. I have seen more officers than usual lately. What *is* it? What *is* it? I believe it's the possession of power. Give a man power over other men, and he deteriorates at once. The 'troops' are decent and charming, I believe, not because they suffer but because they are powerless. – And the devil who rules this planet has contrived that those who are powerless shall suffer.

I expect to stop here until combed out . . . There are things in these last two years that I can never be too grateful for, neyer. My work here is obscure and occasionally humiliating. Never mind. It's been worth my while. Petulant rather than puffy one steals ahead – the whole act of living seems one continuous theft now . . .

In another letter to Sassoon he told him how he could see 'geographically, scars across Europe and Asia, into which, from both sides, all forms of life – men camels vegetables sugar – are being pushed by the respective governments.' To this horror, he continued to think, the only decent response was 'decadence', epicureanism or *fainéantisme*. On a visit to Furness in Cairo he sprained his ankle badly and had to lie up for a week or two in Furness's brother's house, and, searching for something to read in his idleness, he happened on T. S. Eliot's *Prufrock and Other Observations*, recently published by the Egoist Press. It hit his mood to perfection. 'Here was a protest, and a feeble protest, and the more congenial for being feeble,' he wrote later.² 'For what, in that world of gigantic horror, was tolerable except the slighter gestures of dissent?'

So endless did the war seem, he half felt that he might never see

¹ It has not survived.

² 'T. S. Eliot', in *Abinger Harvest*.

England again – or at least that, before he did so, he might somehow find his way to India. Home began to seem unreal – the more so that, in his letters home, he had to watch himself continually to keep out hints of Mohammed. None the less, he followed his mother's doings anxiously, and implored Florence to keep an eye on her. Maimie Aylward fell ill and was clearly dying, and Lily, who went to Salisbury to nurse her, wanted Maimie to spend her last days in Weybridge. Hearing this, Forster told her to empty his study and sell his furniture, so as to make an extra bedroom; further – guessing that she was short of money* – he even urged her to sell his typewriter. He struggled to imagine England, with its air-raids and food-queues, and for a time, out of an impulse of solidarity, made a principle of refusing dinner-invitations. Nevertheless, he told Florence Barger (14 May 1918), it was as if Mohammed had 'fallen like some lovely cloud' between himself and the war. 'Were he to rise I should see it again. He has hidden my home life too.'

Mohammed got a few days' leave in May 1918 and came to see Forster in Alexandria. Forster was still convinced he could not have him to his flat. He told Florence Barger that it would be different if his landlady were disobliging: 'But when a perfect person turns odd and huffed you have to notice it.' Florence asked him why he didn't simply move. But this he was not inclined to do, so he and Mohammed had to meet where they could, at the house of Mohammed's friend the matrimonial agent, or on a hillside near Mex, where they sat 'as Maurice and Clive sat at Cambridge'. Forster told Mohammed he should give up his job and come back to Alexandria and take an allowance from himself till he found work, but Mohammed refused. He said, philosophically, 'Two days have passed like two minutes, yet I think perhaps it is best so, for if I walk with the same friend every day I have sometimes wanted another. Now we shall again be anxious for one another for six months and then have this time of happiness.'

Shortly afterwards, Mohammed did in fact give up his job, to avoid signing on for the duration; and it so happened that, at about the same time, his father died and his brother was drowned in a bathing accident. As a consequence, he inherited the family house at Mansourah and a little money – just enough to consider setting up in business. The best possibility seemed to be the cotton trade – that is to say, buying cotton in the villages for sale in the Cairo market. He

had a prospective partner who, Mohammed told Forster, 'I think cannot pull Mohammed's leg.' Forster offered to lend him £70 capital, and, after some pressing, he accepted – also sending Forster on various business errands in Alexandria, such as enquiring the current price of cotton-bags. Being now a householder, Mohammed also decided to get married. His first idea was that he should marry his brother's widow. This fell through, but thereupon he quickly found another match.

In July, before the marriage, Forster came to stay with him in the family house. It was a little slum dwelling, in a muddy lane overrun with ducks and chickens, and Mohammed had let most of it; thus they had to live in one room – a room so crammed that, on entering, they had to jump straight on to the sofa. To wash, they stripped in a grimy stone-floored passage and poured tins of water over each other. Forster told Florence Barger (16 July 1918) that he blessed his adaptability: 'Where would I be if I had gone in for "requiring" things like Plugs and Plates?' They spent their two days visiting among Mohammed's friends. Mohammed still refused gifts, but they exchanged various cast-off clothes and went together to a tailor, for Mohammed to be measured for a suit (a little too large for him) which they could possess in common. In bed at night they played the fool like children, Mohammed declaring 'Morgan I will hurt you! – Edward I will kill you!' Mohammed was in high spirits, looking forward, he said, to 'living as a happy man in my own paternal home'. Forster felt happy for him and was not jealous of the coming marriage.

Not long after his return, however, he received a desolate letter from Mohammed. It said that he was ill, had been losing weight and spitting blood, and fairly certainly had consumption. 'I do not trouble much about my illness,' he wrote. 'I believe that only the death is my relief from this troublesome world.' He went on with his marriage-plans, and the wedding took place on 1 October 1918, but his letters continued gloomy; he was ill, his business was doing badly, and he had been in trouble with the police over selling some bags of rotted cotton. By the last days of the same month, with the defeat and surrender of Turkey, Forster's Red Cross work more or less came to an end, and he had to tell Mohammed that he would be leaving Egypt in January.¹ The news added to Mohammed's depression. He wrote:

¹ 'What a time of mad joy!' wrote his Aunt Eliza Fowler to Lily, at this time, apropos of the armistice with Germany. 'Miss Roberts was much

I feel very feeble and I am looking for anything to strengthen me but I have not found any here. I believe I am growing thinner and thinner . . . I was looking for a bottle of that oil of this fish but they ask a great sum of money, moreover it is not I think from the best kind . . . I am not looking forward to my future nor to my career.

Your miserable friend,
Moh. el Adl.

According to Mohammedan custom, it would not be proper for Forster to stay with Mohammed after his marriage; however, in defiance of this, he came for a farewell visit and found things better than he had feared. Mohammed was enjoying marriage, claiming that before it 'he had not been in the world'. Forster only caught glimpses of his wife, Gamila, but told Florence Barger that she was very young, simple, and charming. He enjoyed hearing her and Mohammed laugh together:

She is like some tame and pretty country animal, and he will be kind to her as to all, but the idea of companionship never seems to have entered his head . . . He differs from the northerner in being unsentimental, and in keeping his senses apart from his mind.

He asked Mohammed to obtain him some of the locally-made flutes or panpipes, to take as presents for Florence's children. To this Mohammed replied: 'Why do you not take them costlier gifts? Why not take them a pair of Egyptians?'

affected with the downfall of the viper, so like him to run away, but his time is to come, the shameful boasting bubble . . . Now the great joy is to come dear Lily to you. Morgan will soon I hope be with you, for goodness sake for a little time keep the frothy women off.'

3 Sins of Empire

Forster returned to England at the end of January 1919. His mother treated his homecoming as a solemn occasion, insisting, for the first time since his boyhood, on reading family prayers in his presence. The gesture pleased him, and later he was to reflect that a little more ritual in their life together might have helped them. He soon found, though, that contrary to his hopes, nothing much had changed in their relationship. He had imagined that his three years' absence, together with his release from sexual 'apprenticeship', might have given him independence, but, for good or evil, he found himself still in her power: he loved her, knew he could not be frank with her, yet still needed her good opinion and feared to be despised or pitied by her. One morning at breakfast, soon after his return, he broke down after reading a letter from Mohammed, and was angry at himself afterwards. 'Very unwise,' he noted in his diary, 'for it puts me in mother's power. She is *very* sweet, but it is never safe to be seen in pieces.' The solution, he had learned, was not to be too long in her company at one time; and within days of his return he departed on a round of visits, going to stay with the Bangers in Englefield Green, with the Merediths, in Belfast, and then to Lyme Regis for a holiday with Lowes Dickinson.

He also, during the next month or two, renewed contact with Frank Vicary, his friend from hospital-searching days, and invited him to stay at Weybridge. Vicary was now a miner, working in the Kent coalfields. As before, Forster found him very charming—odd, imaginative, unexpected – and Lily took to him also. It was an inter-class friendship of the kind that Forster found romantic. He warned himself to make no sexual approaches, but fell into the role of

protector towards Frank, helping him with advice and money. After a little while, he even arranged to give him a small regular allowance.

It was a difficult moment for him in his own career. At the time of the success of *Howards End* he had asked himself whether, when his reputation declined, as it probably would, he would begin to feel envious towards other writers: and now the test had come. He was not forgotten, it is true; during 1919 Arnold's reissued *A Room with A View* and *Howards End* and Alfred Knopf published the first American edition of *Where Angels Fear to Tread*. All these were quite small printings, however. His was no longer a really famous name, as it had been briefly before the war – certainly not a household word like that of Wells or Bennett or Galsworthy. As things proved, the fact aroused no envy in him at all – he was always to be immune to envy as an emotion. Nor did it, as might have been natural, make him begin to doubt his own worth. He was quite clear, for instance – when he thought of the matter – that Galsworthy was his inferior. When asked this year to review a novel by Galsworthy, he refused, saying 'I can't patronize novelists who once were or might have been my fellows. And I can't look up to them.'¹ Similarly, when he heard from Hugh Walpole that Knopf wanted Walpole to write an Introduction to *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, he squashed the idea briskly.

My dear Walpole,

Damn those people – oh look here – in the first place I don't want to be introduced at all; in the second place I don't want you to introduce me, for the reason that you are *not* minor and the veteran business does, just here, come in I find . . .

Nevertheless he had to face the fact that his career as a novelist was probably finished and he would have to find some other purpose in life. It was necessary even from the money viewpoint, for his investments had suffered during the war, and his royalties had dwindled. He might eventually have to consider finding a full-time job. Meanwhile the obvious course was literary journalism. He was much in demand as a reviewer, so there were plenty of congenial openings for him – for instance the *Nation* and the *Daily News*, with both of which he had a long-standing connection. He was also being pressed by Siegfried Sassoon to review for the *Herald* – recently reconstituted as a daily with Sassoon as its literary editor. Forster

¹ Letter to Siegfried Sassoon, 18 October 1919.

had admired the *Herald's* radical and pacifist stand during the war and liked the notion of writing for it – though as he told Sassoon, he wasn't sure if he knew what the Common People wanted, his own past having been uniformly refined. The *Athenaeum* was also eager for work from him. This, the most famous of the Victorian weeklies, had briefly converted itself into a monthly, with Middleton Murry as its literary editor. Forster particularly liked the *Athenaeum*. 'Here at last,' he wrote later, 'was a paper which it was a pleasure to read and an honour to write for, and which linked up literature and life.' He wrote a good deal for it in the next two years, beginning his campaign for Cavafy in its pages, and for a time he acted as its theatre critic. In all, in these and other journals during the years 1919–20, he would produce something like a hundred reviews and articles. It was a decent substitute for creation, and he enjoyed it, though in gloomier moments it gave him feelings of futility:

12 Aug. 1919. I am happiest when busy. How fatuous! I see my middle age as clearly as middle age can be seen. Always working, never creating. Pleasant to all, trusting no one. A mixture of cowardice and sympathy. Blaming civilization for my failure. At the end of these activities begins a great pain, after which death, but I cannot realize such things. I do not bother about keeping young since my triumph with M. I long for something of which youth was only a part. I don't see what it is clearly yet, but know what keeps me from it. I am not vain, but I am sensitive to praise and blame: this is bad. Is it just the aimiable [sic] journalist – who can't even write as soon as he looks into his own mind?

Soon after his return to England he had had his long-delayed meeting with Siegfried Sassoon, finding him very engaging, and evidently eager for his friendship. Sassoon was now in his early thirties. He was attractive and impressive in appearance: tall, beak-nosed and hawk-faced, with abundant reddish-brown hair. In manner he was a mixture of *hauteur* and naïveté, sometimes voluble, sometimes taciturn, egocentric in an ingenuous way, and full of disordered opinions. His talk came out in little spurts and was often almost inaudible. He took to Forster, as Forster had taken to him, and the two quickly became intimate, meeting and dining out frequently during Forster's London visits. Forster, from the first, took a paternal and admonitory tone towards Sassoon, thinking him muddled in his ambitions and relationships and altogether, as he once told him, 'wanting rather more than the world's economy can provide'.

Out of reaction to the war, Sassoon had become a Socialist. He had done some campaigning for Philip Snowden in the 1918 election and talked with violence against the idle rich – especially against his own millionaire Sassoon cousins. By now, too, he had made the round of literary society. He was intimate with most of the surviving ‘Georgian’ poets, and with the Sitwell circle. He also had various friends among the older generation – among them Gosse, Robert Bridges and Thomas Hardy. He saw it as his function to bring the literary generations together, it was under his auspices that, later this year, Forster paid a first visit to Hardy at Max Gate.

For all this, Sassoon liked sometimes to think of himself as a simple-hearted fox-hunting man, astray among Bohemians. Once, in these early days of his friendship with Forster, he wrote to him, defensively, ‘You *must* realize that I am *not* an intellectual.’ Forster, amused, replied: ‘I had no idea that you were not an intellectual. I used to think I was not. Now I think I am. It makes, of course, not the least difference to one’s enjoyment or one’s insight or any thing else.’¹ As a poet, Sassoon was finding himself in difficulties, uncertain of his direction, Forster urged him not to type himself as a satirist. ‘As for satire,’ he wrote to him, ‘for God’s sake only write if it amuses you or if savage indignation impels you; the satirical *habit* means slow death of the most ignoble kind. I should have thought that, once out of the army, you would have lost interest in satire.’²

Sassoon revealed, or perhaps Forster had already learned from gossip, that he was homosexual. He was secretive and rather anguished about his love-life,³ but became confiding with Forster, who from time to time would offer him advice. In one such letter, Forster wrote to him:

... you ought to drop your Catholic. I think the objection is even greater than in the case of Colin. If *you* were involved, that’s another matter, but it’s merely your (too stupid to find right words) – inquisitiveness and so to speak vanity that are involved, while him you may get into a most frightful casuistical tangle.

¹ Undated letter, probably *circa* June 1919.

² Undated letter, probably *circa* June 1919.

³ According to his friend Sam Behrman, when Sassoon was in America in 1920 giving readings from his war-poems, he was bitterly hurt by a reported remark of Edna St Vincent Millay’s. ‘I wonder whether he would have cared so much if it were a thousand virgins who had been slaughtered.’ (S. N. Behrman, *Tribulations and Laughter* (1972), p. 116.)

Not to have confessed the 'certain difficulties' is I suppose a sin, and anything that from our point of view would be better, would be infinitely worse.¹

Sassoon had written some 'unpublishable' writings, and he showed them to Forster, who, in return, lent him *Maurice*.

Forster, since the war, had been without a London club,² and Sassoon introduced him to one – just then very popular with the radical intelligentsia – the 1917 Club in Soho. It had been founded by Ramsay MacDonald and friends of his, in honour of the Russian revolution and as a place in which to talk freely without fear of DORA.³ It had premises, very grubby ones, in Gerrard Street, a street occupied otherwise by prostitutes, and was frequented by every kind of progressive: labour politicians, pacifists and communists, vegetarians, free lovers and theosophists. Many leftish writers belonged, the Sitwells, Aldous Huxley and the Woolfs all being members. Virginia Woolf used to find that her friends, Forster among them, would, in her phrase, 'gather to a bunch' at the club most weekdays at teatime.

She and Forster gradually were growing a little more intimate. She was drawn to him, though sometimes feeling that he shrank from her misogynistically, as 'a woman, a clever woman, an up to date woman'. Seeing him one day at the 1917 Club, beside Clive Bell, she was struck by the contrast they made. 'Clive showed as gaslight beside Morgan's normal day – his day not sunny or tempestuous but a day of pure light, capable of showing up the rouge and powder, the dust and wrinkles, the cracks and contortions of my poor parakeet.'⁴ When her *Kew Gardens* and *The Mark on the Wall* came out in the summer of 1919, Forster gave them a very appreciative and imaginative review. It made her realize, once again, how much she valued his approval; and when he disparaged *Night and Day* to her, it caused her to reflect that even his blame made her happier than other people's praise. He impressed her as very detached, very sure of himself, but timid, with no intensity or rapidity about him, and easily drowned by Bloomsbury vociferation. He resembled, she thought, 'a

¹ Undated letter, probably June or July 1919.

² Before the war he had for a short time belonged to the Savile Club, resigning, so he said, because the Brussels sprouts were cold (probably, actually, because of the expense).

³ The much hated *Defence of the Realm Act*.

⁴ Virginia Woolf's diary, 10 January 1920.

vaguely rambling butterfly', and was as hard to catch or pin down as a butterfly. She liked his odd, direct way of explaining things: how he only had £26 in the bank and would come to stay with her and Leonard in Sussex if they paid his fare; how he hated Stevenson, how he made up his novels as he went along. . . . She felt there was a lot to say about him, though she didn't yet know how to say it

Forster, before leaving Egypt, had found a publisher for his *Alexandria; a History and a Guide*, and was expecting proofs. Meanwhile, he was doing some journalism about Egypt and, partly on Mohammed's account, was following the news from there with a sense of personal involvement. Soon after his return there had been serious disturbances in Egypt. The country was still under martial law, but there was now an organized nationalist party, and its leader, Zagloul, had asked permission to lead a political delegation to Britain. The request had been refused, contemptuously; and thereupon Zagloul had declared a campaign for total independence for Egypt, to which Britain had responded by deporting him to Malta. As a result, in March 1919 there were strikes and rioting in Egypt, several British being murdered and their deaths being followed by very harsh reprisals. The events prompted Forster to write to the *Manchester Guardian* (29 March 1919), condemning Britain's record in Egypt and her wartime policy over the Egyptian Labour Corps.

Sir.

May I after over three years in Egypt, confirm the main statements in Captain Guest's¹ account of conditions there? As he points out, the causes of the present unrest must be sought for in something deeper than the grievances of the Nationalist party. The *fellahin* have become embittered, for the first time in the history of our occupation, and there is no doubt that the military authorities of the E.E.F. are mainly to blame for this. Recruiting for the Egyptian Labour Corps and similar bodies was at first popular, for the pay is good. But before long the supply of volunteers ran low, and then the military authorities gradually adopted a system of compulsion. The governor (*mudir*) of each province was required to supply so many men; he assigned the various districts to his subordinates, and they informed the head

¹ His letter followed an article by L. Haden Guest in the issue for 25 March, in which Guest blamed the disturbances on Britain's mishandling of the Egyptian Labour Corps during the war and on uncertainty among Muslims over British intentions in the Middle East

man (*omdeh*) of each village how many *fellahin* he must provide. The system was absolutely secret. The districts that suffered most were the country ones, where public opinion could least express itself. It was extended to the towns as the needs of the army grew, until at last only Cairo and Alexandria were exempt. No doubt it would have reached them but for our victories in Palestine – victories to which, according to all accounts, the work of our Egyptian auxiliaries substantially contributed.

With regard to the treatment of these ‘volunteers’ while they were in health opinions vary, but several British soldiers have informed me, unasked, that it was brutal. With regard to their treatment in sickness there is only one opinion. It was disgraceful. Insufficient in number, ill-equipped, unsupervised, the hospitals promoted rather than checked the typhus epidemics that were raging. The official view, apparently, was that the Egyptians are never ill, but if ill are certain to die, and treatment seems scarcely to have existed. In a case for the facts of which I can vouch, a native was sent into one of these hospitals with some slight ailment and at once caught a fever which almost carried him off. He had to bribe an orderly for everything, including a bed, and around him men were dying unattended. Small wonder that the hospitals were regarded by our own troops as centres of infection, and that they dreaded being camped in their vicinity.

We can never replace the *fellahin* whom we have so needlessly destroyed, but we can perhaps enter into the feelings of the survivors and realize why the present disturbances have occurred quite as much in country as in the towns. When I arrived in Egypt the people were invariably friendly, but in 1918 there was marked change – silence from the adults, and from the children an occasional hooting which, trivial in itself, showed how the wind was blowing. And just at the time of our victories a plaintive little popular song was born and sung to a minor tune about the street –

My native town, oh my native town!

The military authorities have taken my boy.

A week or two after this letter, there arrived from India the first news of the Amritsar massacre. *The Times* reported the event briefly and non-committally: ‘At Amritsar, on April 13, the mob defied the proclamation forbidding public meetings. Firing ensued, and 200 casualties occurred.’ There was also some comment in a leader, and the following week the *Nation* ran an article on the shootings, but for the moment the affair did not make much stir in Britain. (Indeed it did not become a national issue till next year, when the Hunter Committee published its report.) The news, however, coming on top

of the reprisals in Egypt, fed in Forster a general sense of indignation against his country – still run, so it seemed, by the old gang, made more powerful and irresponsible by the war. He expressed his feelings in an ironical letter to the *Daily Herald*,¹ headed 'Hawkeritis';

Sir,

Europe is starving. In Egypt the native population is being arrested wholesale. Similarly in India. In Russia our troops are being employed on some unknown adventure. At home prices are rising, unrest is increasing, our homes are full of the wreckage of four years war. Are we downhearted? No. Do we clamour for facts, for the removal of the censorship, for the repeal of DORA? No; a thousand times no. In Paris a handful of generals and diplomats are deciding the future of the world. Are we interested in their decision? Not the least. Give us something to shout about. That's all we want.

Mr Hawker comes along. He has done for money what thousands of other airmen have done for nothing – namely, made a dangerous flight. And, unlike thousands of others, he has got through. One is glad that he is all right, just as one is glad that Mrs Hawker possesses a fawn-coloured skirt. They appear to be an amiable young couple, and one wishes them well. But why in the name of goodness, should we get Hawkeritis? This planet is passing through the supreme crisis of its history. It is being decided whether we shall be governed openly, like a free people, or secretly as in the past. And how the cynics who govern us secretly must have gloated over the hysterics of last Tuesday! 'There goes the mob' they must have thought; 'just the same as ever after four years of suffering – indifferent to truth, incapable of thought, and keen only on trifles. As long as we arrange for an occasional Hawker to be shouted at and boomed in the newspapers we can manage them as easily as ever.'

The 'mob' will not be governed as easily as the cynics think. On the other hand, we shall never conquer unless we divert our enthusiasms to worthy things, the real things. Until a people is serious it will never be free.

This letter was published on 30 May, and meanwhile, from a friend of Mohammed's in Egypt, he had received some very disturbing news – that Mohammed had been arrested and was in prison. For a

¹ *Daily Herald*, 30 May 1919. The flying-feat referred to was the first, and unsuccessful, attempt to fly the Atlantic, made by Harry G. Hawker and Mackenzie Grieve. Their plane came down into the sea 740 miles short of Ireland but they were rescued by a Danish steamer. The newspapers were full of the story for many days.

time he could discover no more. Pretty clearly, the arrest had some connection with the recent disorders in Egypt, but the only other clear fact he could gather, for the moment, was 'that by paying a £10 fine he could have Mohammed's sentence curtailed by three months. He duly sent the money, but otherwise he felt helpless, anguished on Mohammed's behalf, and cursing his own ill-management in not finding a better 'agent' in Egypt.

While in this anxious frame of mind, daily awaiting news from Egypt, he received a long and impassioned letter from Malcolm Darling about the Amritsar affair. Darling had been in the Punjab at the time of the massacre, and it had disturbed him profoundly, shaking for the moment both his patriotism and his love for India. In the days just before the shootings, there had occurred two brutal assaults on Englishwomen, and he had witnessed the resulting hysteria and closing of ranks among the British. In fact, he had suffered under them painfully himself. When the news arrived of the first disturbances at Amritsar, he and Josie had been at the nearby town of Gurdaspur, preparing to go on a tour of co-operative societies.¹ The Superintendent of Police, alarmed by the news, had urged him to 'stay in Gurdaspur and cancel his tour, but Darling, thinking this would give a bad appearance, had set out as planned. This was on 11 April, two days before the massacre in the Jallianwallah Bagh, and, on returning to Lahore after his week's tour, he had found himself accused of dereliction of duty – that is to say, of refusing help to a colleague in time of emergency. The gossip in the Club was that he had shown cowardice.

The affair had been smoothed over, and for the moment he did not tell Forster of it, and wrote only of the general tragedy. 'The world for the moment has gone mad,' he wrote (11 July 1919):

Ever since the Armistice I have grown more and more pro-German to use the cant phrase of those, the largest number, that still see red. If the Germans hated us before, they will hate us twice as much now. Said my ever ardent Josie tonight – if I were German I would long for boys to bring up to avenge this peace. – We have, I fear, missed a great opportunity . . .

But what of India you say. Why talk of things you know nothing about, when there are 30,000 things I want to know about India? Well, we're in a bit of a mess out here too. Racial hatred

¹ Darling's main work in India was in the field of agricultural co-operation.

in towns leaping in a twink to pillage and murder, murder too of the most horrible kind. Then panic and cruelty – the two go together. I understand now why Germans did those terrible things in Belgium, they got cold feet passing thru and fell blindly upon the people whom they feared. So with us (with a big difference of course). We did not rape and hack to pieces, but one day in Amritsar they shot down hundreds, mostly zemindars, there by religious hazard (Bhaisakh Day). I have seen the place – a death trap. 5 or 6,000 there, the kernel of them thoroughly seditious, but the majority lookers on, mooching about as zemindars do. Enter infuriated general – ‘I took 30 seconds to make up my mind’, said he to Watkin – and then – 1500 rounds God it makes me sick to think of it. Yet I was told by my chief 10 days later – ‘people at the Club (Lahore) say you ought to be court martialled for criticizing.’ Surprising the number of Englishmen who got the wind up those days Our D.C. – Supdt of Police¹ notably. Many others too. Josie was magnificent – refused to go up to the Hills, came out into Camp with me when everyone else was huddling at Headquarters. It was undoubtedly a bad quarter of an hour, actually about 10 days, that they gave us – but for Martial Law things might have pitched us all onto the bonfire. The zemundars were luckily absorbed in their harvest but in some Districts they found time to burn quite a lot of stations. Wires cut everywhere of course as in Egypt. Heaven knows what produced so sudden a flare. Literally everyone was caught napping. Some say it’s Bolshevik gold, others that it was all spontaneous. One thing is clear – the big towns hate us. Martial Law (kept on much too long) has cowed them (easily done out here) but the old bitterness remains, embittered. On the other side you can guess the effect of the Amritsar murders. They were awful Morgan. Two of the men I knew slightly. But it was the way they tried to batter the women to death. One, a friend of Josie’s, who had ridden into the City to save *Indian* girls (Christian) was set upon and knocked down ½ dozen times before she was left for dead. Mon Dieu, it’s a bad world . . . And now, what’s going to happen. What the Statesman’s panacea? Dyarchy or Democracy. For India, with her 300 million illiterates – God’s truth, we must be possessed. The Gadarene swine are not in it. Yet I almost believe it’s the only way out of the mess Montagu² and his gang have got us into. Home Rule is so much in the air, that now the only way is to let them have it. Let ’em taste the poison they long for. It’s the only way to cure them. It can’t last, any more than a sand castle before a rising tide.

¹ see p. 60.

² Edwin Samuel Montagu, Secretary of State for India 1917–22 See p 68.

In Forster's present mood, this letter came home to him powerfully. He searched the papers for details of the Amritsar affair and questioned Darling further about it when he came on leave; and in his emotions, Egypt and India became more and more identified.

Through his journalism, he now counted as an expert on Egypt, and in the autumn the idea occurred to Leonard Woolf, who was secretary to the Labour Research Department, to invite him to contribute to a Fabian pamphlet on the Egyptian question. He accepted with hesitation but grew confident – he told Woolf – as he found 'how easy it is to write impressively about politics'. What he was composing was a historical Introduction to the pamphlet, relating the story of the British occupation of Egypt. He told himself he was writing it for Mohammed's sake, and he drew on his own experiences 'The mild and cheerful Egyptians,' he wrote, 'seemed – especially to one who had known Indians – an easy people to live with.' They had been alienated by British high-handedness: by forced recruitment to the Labour Corps, the commandeering of supplies, and an absurd wartime censorship, and, in general, by officials who 'had a profound distrust of orientals'. He considered four solutions to the Egyptian problem and came down, without much conviction, in favour of a mandate under the League of Nations. A meeting was called to discuss his pamphlet, and everyone, including Bernard Shaw,* was very approving, wanting him to do more work for the Fabians. The trouble*with this, he wrote to Reid, was that he didn't want to join the Labour party, or any party.

Mohammed had been due for release in October, and for a week or two, when the month had passed without news, Forster fell into acute distress. At last, late in November, a letter arrived from Mohammed, announcing his release and beginning to relate the story of his arrest. (It took him several letters to tell.) What had happened was that back in March, during the disturbances, there had been a railway strike in Egypt. As a result there had been food shortages, and it had occurred to Mohammed and a friend to undertake a little profiteering enterprise, going by boat to Cairo to buy beans and returning to sell them at inflated prices in Mansourah. All had seemed to go well; 'I thought the time after looking at me always cross began to smile,' Mohammed wrote. However, his partner, while selling their beans on the street, had been accosted by two Australian soldiers, who wanted to sell him an army revolver. Mohammed, who had been at lunch,

returned at this juncture and, according to his account, had stopped the transaction. The soldiers had gone off, swearing, but two hours later they had returned with an order for the arrest of Mohammed and his friend for attempting to buy firearms. Under martial law this was a serious offence. And to make matters worse, Mohammed, under questioning, had pretended to know nothing about the revolver and had told the absurd story that the soldiers had accosted them for 'baksheesh'. The soldiers ('those animals') had stuck to their account; and as a result Mohammed had been tried by a military court and sentenced to six months' hard labour (and his friend to four). So 'They shaved the hair they used a filthy basket instead of a towel, took off my civil clothes and gave me a prisoner's clothes, a jacket and a pair of trousers and a filthy Libda.' There had been bullying and ill-treatment in the prison, and the food had been uneatable – he had nearly starved till, at the cost of all his savings, he had bribed a guard to fetch food from his home. The experience had made him at last violently anti-British. At his trial he had exclaimed that he knew an Englishman who said the English were just and he had believed him, but 'now I found myself that I was about to make a great mistake'.

The story, long-awaited, stirred Forster's indignation. He guessed that, in Mohammed's state of health, prison had done him fatal injury, and his anger swelled against an empire that – here as in India – made such injustices possible. In his New Year's Eve review he recorded that Mohammed's imprisonment had 'really wrecked' him this year.

* * *

Early in the New Year, Siegfried Sassoon went to the United States, on a poetry-reading tour, and it was arranged that from March, Forster should take his place as literary editor on the *Daily Herald*. The job entailed two days' work a week, for which he was paid £5. He found the work entertaining, and was glad, especially, to be able to give reviewing work to Forrest Reid, whose name, he thought, needed pushing.¹ Before long, however, he found himself engaged in a battle to defend his page. He complained to Reid (18 April 1920) that 'A "conference" consisting of the General, Assistant, Foreign

¹ He published reviews by, among others Francis Burrell, David Garnett, Gerald Gould, Aldous Huxley, H. J. Massingham, Forrest Reid, Bertrand Russell, C. K. Scott Moncrieff, Frank Swinnerton, Rebecca West and Leonard Woolf.

News-, Boxing-, Childrens-, and Sub-Editors, indeed all of the Editors except the Literary Editor, decides the length and quality of my Reviews, or attempts to.' He resisted vigorously, being resolved on resigning if he did not get his way, and in fact won his point. He got a feeling, however, that he was not popular in the *Herald* office, and after two months he gave the job up.

It was a continuing chagrin to him that he was not creating. He lamented it in a letter to Reid, who replied by speculating – rather more intimately than Forster quite liked – about the causes of his sterility. Forster told Reid (3 March 1920) that there was no one he would rather have such a letter from, but 'it is not the sort of letter I want to be appropriate to my troubles'.

Why is it that one so dreads any discussion of the unconscious within one? It obscurely attacks one's pride, I suppose. I know that though I try to write back to you frankly, I shall probably fail.

I think that I've stopped creating rather than become uncreative you are quite right there I have never felt I'm used up. It's rather that the scraps of imagination and observation in me won't coalesce as they used to. Whether I'm happy or sad or well or unwell (and I've been all in the last 8 years, *very* sad, *very* happy) the internal condition doesn't change. I'm sure that the Psycho-Analysts would nip on to it, and might possibly diagnose a toad. But I mistrust not so much their judgement as their influence. I should be very reluctant to let them meddle with me and make me change my estimate as to what is within myself. What they call a toad may be something that I call a precious stone . . . These people have no sense of literature and art and I regard with foreboding and resentment their offers to turn an artist upside down.

It was no longer a secret among his friends that he felt dried up as a novelist, and from time to time they would suggest other careers. Sydney Waterlow, who had re-entered the Foreign Service, was full of schemes on his behalf, and in the autumn of 1919 procured him the offer of a post in the Inter-Allied Commission in Germany. It was a well-paid job and attracted him in some ways – he felt he might be a good administrator – and he vacillated unhappily for some weeks before refusing. Then in the following spring, Sydney arranged an opening for him in the Foreign Office. Again he agonized for some time before refusing; and soon after this, on his own initiative, he wrote to the Maharaja of Dewas asking if there might be a post for

him at his court. This was a notion they had discussed earlier¹ and – were it to be realized – it would be a considerable adventure; all the same his letter was in a sense an admission of defeat, and while he awaited an answer he fell into depression. It was quite acute, but he was rescued from it – decisively, for the moment – by an old Cambridge friend of his, Hilton Young.²

Young, a much-decorated war-hero, was now Parliamentary Secretary to H. A. L. Fisher, the Minister for Education. Forster and he rarely met, but there was a bond between them, a memory of an exchange, 'not erotic but affectionate and mysterious', of many years before.³ Young, so different from himself in almost all ways – worldly, 'Wilcoxian', true-blue – was someone he felt he could profit from, and, during an hours-long talk one day in October, Young did him more good, he felt, than any psychoanalyst could have achieved.

Oct. 28. Hilton Young tea and dinner with him a week ago. He gave me carefully and considerately, with great sensitiveness and affection, some advice . . . Surmising the artist from the egoist – he ranks himself as the latter – he thought that the path to creation is to be found not by looking about one, but by peering into the lumber room of one's mind. 'It's a dark difficult place to see in – but presently something may catch your eye that will do.' His words impressed me deeply as did their sequel. He rose and looked at the book case, evidently daring himself 'And one stocks the lumber room by –' The exact phrase I forget but the thought was familiar because it had struck me in *By Sea and Land*.⁴ The point is that one must think and do and frequent what is decent. What a man has lived with he will have to die with. Exactly at what in my life Hilton may be hitting does not concern me, and this indicates the bigness of his personality. I am generally so worried lest people should not approve, and not content until I have defined their criticism and tried to cap it with a counter-criticism. He raised the interview high above fencing. It was

¹ See pp. 27–9.

² Edward Hilton Young (later Lord Kennet), 1879–1960. He was a Liberal, and later a Conservative, politician, becoming Minister of Health 1931–5. He had many friends in Bloomsbury.

³ At the time of Hilton Young's death in 1960, Forster noted in his diary (15 July 1960): 'As for H – , I remember something passing between us over $\frac{1}{2}$ century ago in Malcolm's mother's drawing-room. something not erotic but affectionate and mysterious. . . . He referred to it afterwards, and from that time I regarded him without fear.'

⁴ Hilton Young's book of that name, published in 1920.

practical and helpful in the sense that it has sunk deep. Even if I don't and can't resume creation he has made me vaster and more happy . . . No one, in a direct talk, has ever helped me more, and I think my gratitude got through, he is so acute and subtle. Since, I have street-walked and entertained idleness and indecencies, but the ground beneath them seem to have worn thinner,

Talking to Hilton Young had made him feel larger, 'vaster'. By contrast, his Bloomsbury friends, though he liked and admired them, tended to make him feel smaller, and he was wondering just now about his relations with them 'I don't think those people are little,' he told himself, 'but they belittle all who come into their power.' At the Woolfs' invitation he had recently joined the newly-formed Memoir Club. Members of the club met three or four times a year, dining at a restaurant and then moving on to one or other's home to read autobiographical papers, which had to be of total frankness. It was a reincarnation of a pre-war society, the Novel Club,¹ and included many of the same members, the Woolfs, the Bells, the MacCarthys, Keynes, Roger Fry and Duncan Grant. Forster enjoyed the club and sometimes shone at it,² adopting a special, rather hard and brittle style for his papers to it. Nevertheless, he had qualms about it. He was present in February 1921 when Keynes read his memoir on the Versailles peace negotiations³ and thought it 'most wonderful' and a privilege to listen to. He even enjoyed Clive Bell's paper, the same evening, about his 'copulations'. All the same, not for the last time, he half thought he might be wise to resign.

In the February of 1921, as two years before, he went for a holiday with Dickinson in Lyme Regis. He described the scene to Forrest Reid (17 February 1921):

I am with Lowes Dickinson, who has forgotten the League of Nations, the Vienna University Relief Fund, the famine in China, the French in Syria, the depreciation of the Mark, the lynching of negroes in America, the depopulation of the South Sea Islands, and the unrest in Ireland for a little, and sits in a little mandarin's cap translating Faust with satisfaction and rapidity. All is peace

¹ The Novel Club was founded in 1913, with the professed aim of inducing Desmond MacCarthy to write a novel.

² Virginia Woolf noted in her diary, 5 December 1920. 'The Memoir Club was fearfully brilliant. Morgan very professional.'

³ Published in Keynes's *Two Memoirs* (1949).

and pearly greyness, and the cat and dog, both female, lie down to sleep in each other's arms or sit on the deserted parade and watch the gulls.

Amid this scene of harmony, he received a cable from the Maharaja of Dewas, summoning him to India. The invitation was rather vague – Forster told Reid he was asked to go 'as Prime Minister or something' – but one point was clear. he was to come for a period of six months or so, to replace another Englishman who was on sick-leave. The Maharaja wanted him at once, and he accepted at once, cabling a reply the same day. As soon as he got home from Lyme, he made his travel arrangements, securing a berth on a P. & O. ship for 4 March, and he wrote to Mohammed, proposing that they should snatch a meeting as he passed through Port Said. His friends speculated variously about his plan. 'Morgan goes to India and I think forever,' recorded Virginia Woolf in her diary (1 March 1921). 'He will become a mystic, sit by the roadside and forget Europe . . . we shan't see him again.' The prospect of his departure depressed Lily, and during his last weeks at home she was scratchy and difficult, but he saw this as inevitable and was patient with her; and on the evening of his going, she wrote him a tender letter (one of the very few of her letters to him that have survived)

I feel I want a little chat with you before I go to bed. I feel I got up days ago, and that you have been gone a very long time. The house seems sorrowing for you – such a desolate feeling as if it knew you had really gone and were not in London for the day or away on a visit. I must try to be a brave mammy and keep cheerful and look forward to your return. I shall come and meet you in a new garment of very radiant hues. I felt in a dream when I was out, rather as I felt when war was declared.

4 The Maharaja's Secretary

He was going to India at a time of high political drama. In the summer of 1918, the British Government had published what was known as the Montagu-Chelmsford report,¹ a set of proposals for India based on the principle of 'dyarchy', or the sharing of government between British and Indians. According to this scheme, the administration in the provinces would be divided into two parts, 'law and order' matters being reserved, as before, to the Governor and his appointed councillors, but other, so-called 'nation-building', matters being placed in the hands of native ministers, responsible to elected provincial councils. The proposals were rather paternalistic, the suggestion being that further freedoms for Indians would have to be earned by good behaviour. Nevertheless, they represented a fundamental change in British policy, and they had been received by the Congress leaders with guarded approval. A few weeks after this, however, there had been published another important document, very different in character. It was the report of a committee, known after its chairman² as the 'Rowlatt Committee', appointed by the Government of India to inquire into seditious crime. It was alarmist in tone, painted a lurid picture of new revolutionary threats and techniques, and recommended very repressive legislation. The relative timing of the two reports was disastrous. The goodwill earned by the Montagu-Chelmsford proposals was instantly dissipated. And worse, long before these proposals could become law, the

¹ After its sponsors, the Secretary of State for India, Edwin Montagu, and the Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford.

² A judge named Sir Sydney Rowlatt.

Government of India had taken action on the Rowlatt report, passing, early in 1919, Acts denying political prisoners the right to trial by jury and giving provincial governments the power of internment. Resentment in India had been intense. Gandhi, who emerged as a leader at this moment, had organized *hartals*¹ in protest against the Rowlatt Acts, the *hartals* had led to riots and to the fatal events at Amritsar, and these, and the vicious punitive measures which followed – public floggings, ‘crawling orders’² and the like – had transformed the whole nature of Indian politics. Congress, hitherto an association of middle-class intellectuals, had in these few months become a mass movement. And Hindus and Muslims, to the alarm and incredulity of the British, had joined in a common front.

The Muslims nursed their own quite separate grievance against Britain. They believed her, and with reason, to be plotting the dismemberment of the Turkish empire – which, as being the seat of the Caliphate, was still the spiritual head of Islam. During the period of the Versailles peace negotiations, feeling over this had grown fierce, and a nationwide *Khilafat*³ campaign had been launched in India. It was, in many ways, an unrealistic movement. Its leaders made wild and unfulfillable promises to Turkey, and at one stage set in motion an abortive exodus of Muslims to Afghanistan, with very tragic results. Nevertheless the movement gained a large following; and when the terms of the Treaty of Sèvres became known, with their very harsh treatment of Turkey, the *Khilafat* leaders had looked round for some positive action. It was the chance that Gandhi had been waiting for – ‘the moment of moments’, as he said, for creating a united party and country. He pledged Hindu support for the *Khilafat* campaign. Congress and the Muslim League merged, for the moment, more or less into a single party. And in September 1920, at a special meeting of Congress at Calcutta, Gandhi, with full Muslim backing, had declared a policy of ‘non-co-operation’ with the British.

* * *

No more on his present visit to India than on his earlier one did Forster come for political purposes, or with politics uppermost in his

¹ Days of national mourning, when business was suspended.

² The street in which a woman missionary had been attacked was declared a ‘crawling lane’, and Indians wishing to pass through it had to do so on their hands and knees.

³ i.e. ‘Caliphate’.

mind. His attitude was still, and in a sense always remained, the one expressed in his 'Salute to the Orient'. '... we who seek the truth are only concerned with politics when they deflect us from it.' In so far as he had one special motive for coming, it was simply that having hitherto mixed mainly with Muslims, he wanted to see more of Hindus. Nevertheless the events of these years 1919-20, both in India and in Egypt, had affected him powerfully and they would be echoed in all sorts of ways¹ in his *A Passage to India*. The novel, whatever its original conception, was profoundly influenced and changed by them.

Forster, who set out for India on 4 March, managed his meeting with Mohammed as arranged. He was still on board ship at Port Said, wondering how to get to their rendezvous, when Mohammed appeared on deck, beaming and excited, having bribed his way on board. They went to a dockside café, where Mohammed, still wearing various cast-off clothes of Forster's, gave him a box of expensive cigarettes - no longer full, as some had had to go in bribes. He was thinner, and, as they talked, it became plain that things were going badly with him; however, having only a few hours together, they agreed to talk of cheerful subjects. Mohammed was impressed by Forster's palace appointment, but he warned him against pride. By now Forster, in a guarded way, had revealed Mohammed's existence to his mother, and they composed a joint postcard to her. All seemed the same between them as it had been two years ago, and they agreed to spend a week or two together on Forster's return from India.

He had been hoping to be met by Masood in Bombay. However, on his arrival there, he found neither Masood nor any message for him. Nor was there an emissary from Dewas, as had been promised, so he felt rather at a loss, and for the moment went to stay with his friends the Goodalls.² A day or two later, as he was standing in the Post Office, two nobles from Dewas, their faces painted red for *Holi*, rushed up to him, having been searching for him for days at a wrong address. Various further confusions ensued, but the party got off the same evening for Dewas, and at Indore a palace car was awaiting them. As they travelled the dull *chaussée*, edged with stunted trees,

¹ They have been analysed by Dr G. K. Das in his *E. M. Forster and India*.

² See Vol. I, pp. 239-43.

that ran from Indore to Dewas, Forster was musing about his sex-life. He remembered how censoriously he had heard the Maharaja once speak of homosexuality, and he said to himself, 'The least I can do is to give him no trouble.' Then, from the car window, he noticed a dead cow with vultures gathering round it. It seemed an evil omen, and the thought occurred to him, 'That's how it will end'

The Maharaja was at the palace entrance when they arrived, bare-headed and capering with glee. His first action was to dictate a cable to Malcolm Darling, and another to Forster's mother. He then handed Forster over to the major-domo, who showed him his rooms. These were on the first floor of the palace and quite extensive, comprising three rooms and a bathroom. In the evening, courtiers fitted Forster out with Indian clothes, and he was taken to the Cavalry Barracks, where a visiting troupe of actors were performing

The following day the Maharaja instructed him as to his duties. The first step in this was a lengthy explanation of the court and its hierarchy. Forster learned that there were four grades of dignitaries: the ruling family, which included H.H. himself, his brother Bhau Sabib and his son Vikramsinha; the great Maratha nobles, the secondary nobles; and the lesser nobles, among whom Forster would belong. To his superiors at court Forster was to salaam with both hands and the whole hand, and he was to do likewise with the British A.G.G. and P.A.¹; in dealing with these latter he was to regard himself as an Indian. The Maharaja wrote him out a list of the court nobles, with comments on their characters, and went on, confusingly, to describe a whole string of further personalities, such as 'Horse Doctor' and 'Eighteen Offices'. Forster also learned that there was a Council of State, though H.H. was vague about its workings.

His own sphere of action was to be the palace garden and tennis courts, the Guest-House arrangements, and the garages and 'electric house', in addition, all mail was to pass through his hands; and apart from this – and most important of his functions – he was to give the Maharaja as much of his company as was possible and sometimes read aloud to him. Forster, who had been picturing himself as some kind of high diplomatic aide or counsellor, was a little taken aback at his duties and not sure how he would cope with motorcars and electric generators. He was told that his predecessor, Colonel Leslie, had been

¹ Agent to the Governor-General, and Political Agent

a great expert in all such matters, as well as being fluent in several Indian languages; so he would hardly shine by comparison. Of course, he could take advice, for instance from the mayor of the palace, Malarao Sahib, or from the chief Indian secretary, Deolekr Sahib; but Deolekr spoke only broken English and Malarao hardly any English at all. As for himself, he spoke a little Urdu – enough to explain himself to servants and taxi-drivers – but knew no Marathi, which was the court language. He wrote to Masood (1 April 1921) that he thought he would be lonely in Dewas.

Still, he told himself, there would be the Maharaja himself, and there he foresaw much friendship and fascination. It was true, he had guessed by now that H.H. was not the 'dear, and a competent dear' that he had first imagined, but, in many ways, a great muddler. But if so, he might be a help to him. At all events, he had come to deepen his knowledge of India, and here was his perfect opportunity. He had learned from Darling, and from his own talks with H.H., that religion was all-important to the Maharaja, so, in studying his character, he determined to see what case it made for religion.

Holi was still at its height. It is the festival of the Sudras, the lowest of the caste-groups, and a time for horseplay and misrule. The Maharaja loved such things and had imported dancers and actors from the Deccan for the occasion – it was they whom Forster had seen perform on his first evening. He had found the play, a bawdy farce, stupid and disagreeable. He described it to Dickinson (14 April 1921):

. . . Husband and wife. She: 'Can I go and see my people?' He: 'Dangerous for you – and for me – and morality generally.' She persists, and as soon as she goes the husband says 'I want a eunuch – *at once*.' – A tall scraggy man with a moustache then came on, in a pink sari, and paid attention to such members of the audience as His Highness indicated. (This is a recognized turn, the boy-dancers did it too.) The 'eunuch' squatted beside his victim and sang 'do not hurt me' – or 'I am not too old yet to remember what we did as boys' – and tried to kiss him amid laughter from the court. Resuming the drama he danced indecently before the husband, made 'terms' with him, bought him sweets, and was coming to a conclusion when the news is brought to the ill-advised wife. She returns from her parents. 'How can you ruin your health by such a proceeding?' is her argument; & I think that's where this particular indecency ended.

Forster was puzzled by this palace of vein of 'naughtiness', for apart from this the tone of the court was strict, and (in theory anyway) actual sexual misbehaviour was frowned on. He supposed it was some kind of release, but it struck him as out of key and surmised that it was 'queered' – made distasteful – by religion. The Maharaja, when he discussed it with him, said: 'If a girl had been acting, it wouldn't have done, it would have been too much. As it is, it was all right.'

April Fool's Day arrived, reinforcing *Holi*, and Forster had to submit to exploding cigarettes and sofas that gave an electric shock. He was also, which pleased him more, given the chance to witness *Holi* observances in the country. Malarao took him to his own native village, accompanied by his cousin (a noble at present out of favour at court) and by Deolekr, who drove. As they were picnicking, villagers approached, singing, and showered them with red powder, and then a group of women emerged through the mud-wall of the village with strange cries. He wrote to his mother (6 April 1921):

They, like the red powder, were part of a Hindu festivity, and squatting at a little distance, looking very Omega-like, they made a bright spot in the dust. The men continued their songs – one about the coming of Europeans to India, the other about the coming of Man to the Earth. Then my companions made me give the company Rupees (which they afterwards replaced stealthily in my pocket). I chose a site for a house, and we passed into the village by the seated ladies who abused us violently – so violently that even the young Sirdar¹ could not understand what was said. This abuse is of course traditional and has nothing personal in it: 3000 years ago in Greece the women did just the same thing at certain festivals.

During the same expedition they took a walk along Dewas's one river, the Sipra, and there occurred an incident which, to Forster, seemed emblematical of India:

Our train of villagers stopped and pointed to the opposite bank with cries of a snake. At last I saw it – a black thing reared up to the height of three feet and motionless. I said 'It looks a small dead tree' and was told 'Oh no,' and exact species and habits of snake were indicated – not a cobra, but very fierce and revengeful, and if we shot it would pursue us several days later all the way to Dewas. We then took stones and threw them across the Sipra ($\frac{1}{2}$ the width of Weybridge Thames) in order to make the snake crawl

¹ Officer.

away. Still he didn't move and when a stone hit his base still didn't move. He *was* a small dead tree. All the villagers shrieked with laughter. The young Sirdar told them I was much disappointed and displeased about the snake, and that they must find a real one. So they dispersed anxiously for a few moments over the country, after which all was forgotten' – I call the adventure 'typical' because it is even more difficult here than in England to get at the rights of a matter. Every thing that happens is said to be one thing and proves to be another, and as it is further said in an unknown tongue I live in a haze ¹

Despite his fears of loneliness, Forster was where he most wanted to be, in the midst of an Indian existence. He had written to Rupert Smith to send him his old servant, and Baldeo arrived in Dewas, more wizened, more morose than ever. Forster's life soon fell into a pattern. Baldeo would make his bed on the roof and serve him breakfast there at 6.30 a.m. From 8.00 to 10.30 a.m. he would work in his office or go on a tour of inspection of the garages, the 'electric house' and the gardens. Lunch was at 10.30, and the two following hours were devoted to the Maharaja, after which he took a siesta, followed by afternoon tea and then tennis or a drive. Dinner was at 8 p.m. and after it there would be conversation or music, or the courtiers would play cards in the palace courtyard, with decanters of whisky and port to hand. It was very hot, and growing hotter (reaching 108° F), but the atmosphere was dry and healthy, and he felt well and vigorous. Dewas was an ugly place, a poor and mean town in a parched and treeless landscape; but he learned to console himself with the magnificent night-sky and the constellation of Scorpio hanging down the whole of the eastern heaven. The proofs of his *Alexandria: a History and a Guide* had followed him to Dewas, and at odd intervals he would correct them, feeling that the book was now remote from him. From time to time, too, now and throughout his stay, he would take out his Indian novel, despairing at the discrepancy between it and the India around him.

Messages from Masood began at last to arrive; he had been on a tour of schools and had only just received Forster's cables. Forster had asked him for money, and he now despatched it in such quantity that the Dewas post office had to deal with it in instalments. A few days later, at the Maharaja's invitation, he arrived in person,

¹ Letter to his mother, 6 April 1921

attended by a private secretary and two servants. His coming was quite an event, for he had never before been a private guest in a Hindu court, nor did Dewas often receive a Mohammedan visitor. The Maharaja was at his most gracious. It was almost like the meeting of two princes, and Masood told Forster that, in addition to the outward ceremonies, H. H. showed him niceties of respect that only another Indian could appreciate. Forster thought Masood's public manner excessively pompous. However, it seemed to go down well, and in private he was as companionable as ever.

To entertain them, the Maharaja arranged an expedition up the sacred hill of Devi, providing an elephant for the occasion. Half way up to the summit, the elephant's howdah began to slip, at which Masood got off, remarking grandly 'I prefer not to be on a tower when the base totters.' Another day the Maharaja sent them in a car to the holy city of Ujjain. There, on the riverside, they beheld a swarm of ash-coloured *saddhus* (fakirs), seated on spikes – some laughing, some quarrelling, others serving tea to one another. The scene was too much for Masood, who expostulated to Forster, as if he were responsible: 'My dear chap, I ask you!' A good deal that he saw at Dewas, like the ill-organized building activities, bothered him too, and he told Forster they were a crying example of his country's inadequacy.

The Maharaja enjoyed Masood's visit and was more and more delighted with the company of his 'dear Morgan'. He was full of solicitude for his comfort, and soon became confiding. Much had happened since Forster's last visit. For one thing, he had separated from his queen. She was the daughter of the Maharaja of Kolhapur, the senior Maratha prince, and the marriage, which had taken place in 1908, had thus been a grand alliance. It had gone disastrously wrong, however, and in 1915 the Marahani had been sent, or had fled, back to her home state. As a result, the rich and powerful Kolhapur and the tiny state of Dewas had become implacable enemies and spent much of their time and revenue in spying on one another. There was a child, Vikramsinha, from the marriage, now some ten years old (he was away in the hills during Forster's stay). But since the separation the Maharaja had taken another wife, named Bai Saheba – wife or mistress, for her status was unclear – H. H. called her his 'Diamond Concubine'. She had born him children; thus dynastic problems were arising, and they were to do so more

seriously when she gave birth to a son. For reasons of protocol, Bai Saheba did not live in the palace but had a tumbledown house of her own near the gates of the city. She had abandoned purdah and, as Forster described it to Dickinson (14 April 1921), 'lay about on carpets in a farm yard, with men and lamps scattered about her.' Forster took to her, finding her intelligent and amusing, and the Maharaja, pleased by this, encouraged him to pay daily visits. A few days after his arrival, her youngest daughter fell ill, and the Maharaja, who idolized Bai Saheba, went to sleep at her house. In his absence, life in the palace fell into confusion, and it was left to Forster to think of sending food down to him. 'Sometimes I feel I am no use to him,' he told his mother (4 April 1921), 'at others that I am the saving of his life.'

The more Forster saw of the Maharaja, the more he longed to be of help to him, and the more of a problem it appeared to find the way. There was no doubt in his mind that the Maharaja needed help. Affairs in Dewas seemed in considerable confusion. The new palace, already under construction when he was there in 1912, was still unfinished, while parts erected ten years ago were already collapsing; and meanwhile, to pay for it and for his other extravagances, H.H. was borrowing heavily on the security of next year's revenues. The spectacle of waste and disorder distressed Forster, and he wrote to his mother (1 April 1921) in baffled tones:

You would weep at the destruction, expense, and hideousness, and I do almost. We live amongst rubble and mortar & excavations whence six men carry a basket of earth as big as Verouka's¹ twenty yards once in five minutes. I have not yet discovered who loosens the earth, but am familiar with the boy who scrabbles it into the basket with his fingers, the man who bears it on his head along the bottom of the chasm, the next man – very chatty and almost naked – who receives it from him and, merely turning round, places it on the head of No 4. No 4 begins the ascent, No 5 continues it, and No 6 who is immensely old totters along the surface and drops the earth on to a heap which will have some day to be cleared away. And the basket has to be passed back. This is the scene under my window, but for acres around the soil is pitted with similar efforts, slabs of marble lie about, roads lead nowhere, costly fruit trees die for want of water, and I have discovered incidentally that £1,000 worth (figure accurate) of electric

¹ The Forsters' cat.

batteries lie in a room near at hand and will spoil unless fixed promptly I can't start on the inside of the house – two pianos (one a grand) a harmonium, and a 'dulciphone', all new and all unplayable, their notes sticking and their frames cracked by the dryness I look into a room – dozens of warped towel horses are stabled there, or a new suite of drawing room chairs with their insides gushing out. I open a cupboard near the bath and find it full of tea-pots. I ask for a book case and it bows like a Kafouzleum¹ and lies rattling on the floor And so on and so forth I don't know what to do about it all, and scarcely what to feel. It's no good trying to make something different out of it, for it is as profoundly Indian as an Indian temple

The real danger for the Maharaja, Forster could perceive, was that things had moved on politically in India. Thus, if H.H. were ruining his state, as he appeared to be, he would now, in the age of Gandhi and Non-co-operation, have not only the British to answer to, but Indian politicians and an Indian press. The Maharaja was in fact alarmed at these developments and complained of British India as the home, not so much of autocracy and tyranny, as of sedition. He managed to exclude Gandhi-supporters from Dewas Senior, but there was a railway station in Dewas Junior where they would alight and shout slogans across the frontier. Like several of his fellow-princes, the Maharaja, as a gesture to democracy, was drawing up a written Constitution for his state, but this was fairly plainly only window-dressing. Forster would try to reason with H.H., and urge prudence, without much success. There was a little incident, over the palace motorcars, which brought out H.H.'s attitude revealingly. The cars were always breaking down, so Forster got hold of a garage-mechanic, in Indore, to come and overhaul them; however, it turned out, the mechanic (an Englishman) had been summoned before and complained that the Dewas drivers would follow none of his instructions. Forster reported this to the Maharaja, but what interested him was not the cars but the domestic politics of the matter. 'Oh that's all right, Morgan,' he said. 'I have him out so that the drivers may see that I *can* have him out; and he on the other hand – it's a very good thing he should see he is not indispensable.'

Forster felt at a loss – also rather a fraud as compared with his predecessor, Colonel Leslie – and cast about in his mind for some

¹ A Victorian toy (of the doll type, I believe; but I have not been able to identify it exactly).

sphere of useful action. He could not really comprehend the state finances, though he guessed they were in a bad state, but he determined at least to do something about the smaller bills and salaries, which were generally months or even years in arrears. He became an expert at this, going to the appropriate officials, making what he called 'a loud lamentation', and acquiring a bag, or several bags, of silver coins, which Baldeo would take and hide in his bedroom till they were required. Sometimes not even a bag was provided, and he had to take the coins in handfuls, depositing them in a pile in the courtyard, amid a crowd of onlookers, while Baldeo went to fetch boot-bags.

Then there were the gardens. The Palace gardens had been the passion of Colonel Leslie, and, in conception anyway, they were extensive and magnificent, comprising various lotus-ponds, some eighty flowerbeds, pits for mangoes and lemon-trees, and grand ornamental terraces. Nothing much grew in them, however, and what did was liable to be eaten by cows. Periodically a law against straying animals was proclaimed by torchlight, to the sounds of drums, and Forster learned to be vigilant for cows, rushing out with the gardeners to lasso them and send them to the pound. The next stage would be the arrival of their owner – always a poor man and in tears, for when a rich man's cow was caught he would hire a poor man to weep for him. Forster learned to ignore the tears and imposed the law with severity. A further trouble was the water-supply. Colonel Leslie's arrangements looked impressive. Down every border there ran a pipe, with standard taps, connected to a large and hideous water-tank, and in theory water to supply the tank could be raised from a nearby well: in theory only, for the well was practically dry in summer, and the pump was quite inadequate for its task. When Forster first complained of this, he was told of a marvellous well, a well that never dried up, known as 'The Water that Speaks', and when evening came, he went off to inspect it. 'It lay in a deep hole on the further side of the raised *chaussée*,' he wrote in a later reminiscence.

We scabbled down to it over rubble, warning one another against a huge black snake which was said to live close by. 'It is beautiful water, but I don't see how we can use it for the garden,' I said – all had waited for me to express an opinion. 'The road is in the way for one thing. We can't pump it up in the cistern, and we can't carry it across in skins.' 'No we can't, we can't, it has been a

mistake', agreed the others pleasantly. We returned to the palace in a pensive and friendly mood.¹

In spite of all difficulties, he planted his seeds, not very hopefully, and wrote a sixteen-page letter to Colonel Leslie, giving him the best news he could of his beloved garden, and the Colonel replied politely.

Colonel Leslie's letters to the Maharaja were in a different tone. He wrote (H.H. showed Forster the letter) that he was greatly disappointed to hear that his works were not being continued. 'So all my plans are set aside. In all the years that I served Queen Victoria (of sainted memory) I have never experienced one fraction of the mortification and humiliation that I underwent while serving you, my dear White Prince. Your heartbroken Father William.' Another letter ran: 'When H.R.H. the Prince of Wales comes to India, does he propose to visit Dewas? If he does, I shall cut my throat. To see the Palace and Grounds that you planned as a monument of piety become a dung hill and a rubbish heap and a laughing stock of those vile sneering Politicals from Indore, is more than my soul can bear, as your saintly mother and mine, both together with God, well know.' Leslie also, so Forster discovered, was writing to Malcolm Darling, who was an old friend of his, to complain of Forster. He was particularly incensed at Forster's dismissing one of the palace chauffeurs. Forster began to be curious about Colonel Leslie. On his arrival, the refrain had been how admirable, how amusing, how energetic the Colonel was: such a great hunter – he had tamed every animal in India except the crocodile; such a dear friend of H.H.'s – they were Father William and White Prince to each other, and when he had had his accident (he had fallen between a train and the platform and been crushed) the Maharaja had gone in person to nurse him. Now, however, as Forster pressed his inquiries, the picture altered: it appeared, or so H.H. said, that Leslie had quarrelled with practically everyone (but especially Deolekar), and had had affairs with the wives of several local residents. Forster asked the Maharaja how he knew this, and the Maharaja explained that one day 'for a joke', he had opened Leslie's letters and found one from a local lady, beginning 'My own darling'. 'But that was bad of you,' said Forster. 'Yes, Morgan,' said H.H., 'I know it was bad of me and I said so. I

¹ 'Woodlanders on Devi', *New Statesman*, 6 May 1939.

repented, still I did it, and that's how I know.' The Maharaja was pledged to have Leslie back in the autumn and felt he could not break his promise. Plaintive messages would arrive from Leslie, saying 'I am sure you prefer Morgan Forster,' whereupon he would send expensive telegrams saying 'I love you more than ever and long to have you with me', but he looked forward gloomily to the prospect and told Forster 'He will notice a great change in my manner.'

Early in May, Bai Saheba gave birth to a baby, another girl, and everything was in upheaval at court, custom demanding that for the next fifteen days the mother should be serenaded by day and by night. For the first five days H.H. was not allowed to see Bai Saheba but camped in the compound of her house, amid a crowd of friends, attendants and cows. The court musicians played, there were fireworks, the army fired rifle-volleys, and *nautch* girls and boys in girls' clothing performed dialogues and dances. At night-time Forster came to join the Maharaja in his encampment and slept beside him, sometimes with his head propped against a bullock's flanks. The din was appalling and usually lasted till the small hours, but one night, about 3 a.m. he was woken by music that he recognized as rare and beautiful, an endless *raga*, performed by a singer and a drummer, that seemed to him 'like Western music reflected in trembling water'.

The finale of the festivities was an elaborate present-giving. Forster described it at length in a letter to his mother (17 May 1921):

H.H. was so very nice – told me about it, so that I might not be left out, and secretly assisted me in my choice. I rested in the morning, and drove down to Bai Saheba's to change into Indian clothes, then drove on with my gifts to join forces with the Commander-in-Chief and his gifts. Malharao, the Chief of Police, etc., etc., swelled the party, and we marched back to Bai Saheba's on foot, first the army, playing the British Grenadiers, then servants, bearing gifts on platters, then ourselves, hand in hand in affable converse, then a huge crowd, and finally the Commander-in-Chief's lady in a *Purdah* carriage. As we reached Bai Saheba's, two other bands struck up, one military but making Indian sounds, the other the violent bang-bang of the Sweepers, outcasts but loyal subjects who stood at the side of the road hitting sieves with shovels. We swept into the courtyard, then melted into nothing, as is the Indian spirit. There was no grand crisis or reception. The gifts were dumped on a durry, where, very anxious, sat H.H. among clerical assistants. For he had to give back to each donor a gift of equal value, and quickly to guess what each

present cost. I gave the lady a sari for day wear and a piece of silk for a jacket, and to the baby a deplorable piece of pink material. This was a respectable minimum gift: near relatives added coconuts, silver ornaments, and rice. While we all messed on the durry, the ladies kept arriving, mostly in covered ox wagons, and were decanted into the purdah tent beside us. The gifts couldn't be taken in because of the Dowager Maharani, who as always was late. A cradle arrived, made by the state carpenters, and very dizzy in its action. H.H. had meant to get me almost into the purdah tent, but desisted, as a few old-fashioned people would have minded. We went into the house behind, against which the tent backed, and I sat by the door and peeped over his shoulder, but saw little. He worked like an underwaiter in a Soho restaurant. The platters came out through the door of the purdah tent, containing the gifts that had been submitted and approved, and he upset them – clothes, coconuts, and all – upon the floor where we sat, in order to leave the platter free for the return service. His return gift was popped on, and back it went into purdah to the wife of the man who made the original gift. Having no wife – or none on the spot – I got my return present direct. I had chosen it beforehand – a goldified turban which he told me was the proper monetary equivalent of what I had given. I was pleased: not so the Dowager Maharani, who rejected her return present because she thought it only cost Rs 200, whereas there was precedent for Rs 250. This, and other bad news kept leaking out through the folds of the tent. H.H. was sad but philosophic. 'I spend all this money in the hope they would be happy, but they quarrel – it always happens . . . yes, the Dowager Maharani has been rude, but how can I take any notice? They will think it revenge for her behaviour in the past to me and she is defenceless now. I shall invite her later on for the singing . . .' all the time pouring valuables on to the dusty floor.

* * *

During the birth-festivities Forster, for most of the day, was left on his own in the palace, with little to do and no one to talk to. The heat was intense. It did not upset him, but its effect, combined with idleness and solitude, was to fill him with sexual desire: during the long siesta period, especially, it became almost intolerable, and masturbation gave no relief. He began to feel he would be ill, and his good resolutions towards the Maharaja gradually weakened. He guessed that among the various palace hangers-on he could find someone he might have sex with. Two, he thought, had already guessed what he wanted: a young Mohammedan who acted as his

postilion, and one of the palace workmen, a Hindu of about eighteen. When the Hindu salaamed him – very respectfully, using both hands – Forster would respond with his whole attention, and when the boy brought him a chair he would thank him with a smile. The coolie took his meaning and found an ingenious method of declaring himself: he took a leather strap and lashed the floor of the Hall with it, hard, startling Forster and making him look in his direction; he lashed the floor a second time, hard, and then a third time, gently, so that Forster would only look round if he wanted to, and when he did so, the boy smiled. After that, for some days the two eyed each other in the corridors, and when the coolie disappeared round a corner, Forster could see from his shadow that he was waiting for him to follow. As he drove to Bai Saheba's, in the scorching heat, the other servant – the postilion – used various tricks to catch his attention. It was as if nothing existed except lust.¹

His resolve held out no longer, and he sought some way of talking with the Hindu coolie. This was not an easy problem, for there were onlookers everywhere; however he hit on a solution. He let it be known that the *tattie*² on his bedroom door needed watering, dropping a hint that the coolie should volunteer for the task. The hint was taken, the Hindu came, and, pretending to show him how to throw the water, Forster stroked his wrist. The coolie smiled happily, and Forster said 'Meet me at 7.30 on the road near the Guest House.' Some ten minutes later, to his dismay, he heard two excited voices outside his door. The first said 'The *burra* [master] sahib has given orders to come at night.' 'At night?' said the other. 'Yes, and he will give me money.' Their voices then mingled with those of other workmen, leaving Forster in a panic of terror and shame. His thought was: 'H.H. has had me out from England because I am Malcolm's friend and as one of the few he can trust, and this is what I do.' To make matters worse, when he looked out of the window, he saw a flurry below and one of the senior clerks of the palace jumping into a bullock-cart. He felt sure the clerk had gone to report the scandal to the Maharaja; and when H.H. himself returned an hour later, his manner – merry, but slightly malicious and hard – seemed to confirm it. As they passed a servant painting the wainscoating, H.H. ex-

¹ In what follows I have drawn on an unpublished Ms. entitled 'K—'.

² A screen made of grass-roots, kept wet as a form of air-conditioning.

claimed impatiently: 'everywhere . . . I cannot get away from them.' Forster sensed a sting in the words; and later that evening, in front of the assembled courtiers, the Maharaja said severely that he meant to banish all catamites from his court: 'What is the good of such people?' He was very silent when, late the same night, Forster joined him, and Forster was now finally convinced that he knew of his escapade. Worse, he felt sure that all the courtiers knew; he got the impression that they were mocking him and no longer held him in respect.

For four days he swallowed his trouble, taking care to avoid or ignore the coolie, but at last he could bear it no longer and asked the Maharaja for a private interview. 'As I think you know, I am in great trouble,' he said.

'Tell me, Morgan,' H.H. replied. 'I have noticed you were worried.'

'I have tried to have carnal intercourse with one of the coolies and it has become known.'

'With a coolie-girl?'

'No, with a man. You know about it, and if you agree I think I ought to resign.'

'But Morgan, I know nothing about it,' said the Maharaja. 'This is the first I have heard of it.'

Forster wished he were dead: he need never have confessed, and he guessed that the confession would do him no good in H.H.'s eyes. For a time, he thought the Maharaja must be lying, but H.H. found harmless explanations for all that had perturbed him. He questioned Forster further, kindly and seriously.

'Why a man and not a woman? Is not a woman more natural?'

'Not in my case. I have no feeling for women.'

'Oh but that alters everything. You are not to blame.'

'I don't know what "natural" is.'

'You are quite right, Morgan - I ought never to have used the word. No, don't worry - don't worry. I am only distressed you did not tell me everything before - I might have saved you so much pain. May I know all about this coolie now?'

When he heard that nothing physical had actually taken place, the Maharaja was reassuring: there was nothing to fear, he said. 'Only always come to me when you are in difficulties like this. I would have found you someone reliable among the hereditary servants, and you could have had him quietly in your room. Yes, yes,

it's true I don't encourage those people, but it's entirely different in your case and you must not masturbate – that's awful.'

Forster was so touched and relieved that when he tried to apologize he broke down. The Maharaja nearly broke down too, crying 'Oh devil! Don't do that Morgan – the only way with a thing like this is to take it laughing.' And he threw himself with zest into schemes for finding Forster a bed-companion. Forster – quite cured of desire for the moment – insisted that he did not want one, that he would abstain from all forms of sex now, only coming to H.H. for advice if lust should trouble him again. The Maharaja would have none of this. God had made Forster the way he was, he said; he was his country's guest and his own honoured assistant; there must be no talk of vows or remorse. Throughout their talk, Forster thought afterwards, H.H. had acted perfectly, like the saint that he suspected him of being. Perfectly in all but one detail: the Maharaja wanted to blame Forster's 'perversion' on Egypt – it pleased him to ascribe all vice to Mohammedans – and he had tried to question Forster about his Egyptian experiences. Forster had felt this impertinent and had fobbed him off with lies.

His virtuous resolutions did not persist, and he began to hope that the Maharaja would renew his offers to procure for him, but H.H. seemed to avoid the whole topic. At last, one evening, H.H. remarked that a palace barber called K—, who had the reputation of a male 'tart', was loitering too much in the palace and that this must stop: it was bad for the other servants. On an impulse, Forster said: 'I wish you could get a boy for me.' The Maharaja responded without hesitation: 'I was waiting for you to mention it, Morgan – not the least difficulty; get K— come and shave you – no possible suspicion – he often comes, indeed he's budgeted for – we'll fix it up now, and I'll have his salary increased.' Forster agreed, somewhat nervously, and a visit from the barber was arranged for noon the next day, a time when Baldeo would be away at dinner. K— proved pretty, overdressed and amiable. He paid a second visit, and on this occasion, as he was shaving Forster, the latter drew K— to him and kissed him. He took it with the greatest calm, and Forster proceeded to bolt the door; but at this point a bucket of water came crashing against the door of the verandah. It was Baldeo, who had come back early from his lunch. As he went on noisily sluicing the *tattie*, Forster hurried K— out by the other entrance.

The Maharaja, when told of this mishap, advised Forster to lose no time on the next occasion: once something definite had taken place, he said, K— would be discreet. All that he begged Forster was that he would do nothing that savoured of passivity: a rumour of that would be harmful. Forster started to tell him the time of his next rendezvous, but H.H. cried 'I don't want to hear, because when the hour comes I shall think of you, and that I don't want.'

All went well on this next meeting, and after it the Maharaja complimented Forster on his improved appearance and sent K— a gratuity of 25 rupees — this was better, he said, than Forster paying K— himself. As was natural with Forster, having had sex with K—, he began to feel a friendly interest in him and wanted to establish some kind of intimacy, but here he found himself baffled: K— was smiling and cheerful but totally blank — there seemed no possibility of human contact with him. The two, moreover, were rather at cross purposes, K— being terrified of the Maharaja, whilst for Forster he was the one person he need not fear.

The arrangement continued, and Forster felt the better for it, but it needed expert management. Baldeo became suspicious and took to cutting short his lunch-hour, and, since K— was unpunctual, Forster was on thorns the whole time — watching for K—'s arrival, watching for Baldeo's return, and, when K— left, watching to see that he did not loiter and gossip. Once they tried meeting in the Guest House Garden, but K—, slinking after Forster in the dark, was mistaken for a thief, and next day there were reports from the gardeners that by their courage and vigilance they had repelled a dangerous gang of robbers. When the Maharaja was told the true story, he devised a new system, by which they should meet in a disused suite of the palace.

The fact that homosexual jokes, though not homosexual acts, were so much a feature of court life, made some gossip inevitable, and H.H. instructed Forster as to his best tactic. This was, he said, to agree cheerfully to every innuendo. Forster took his advice, and when Malarao, who had no idea of the truth, teased him about K—'s visits, he responded gaily, accusing Malarao of jealousy. H.H. assisted by casually letting out Forster's age, which was forty-two — an age at which any normally-constructed Indian might be expected to be impotent. Forster mentioned his philanderings in a letter to Mohammed (26 August 1921), who replied 'I got nothing to say except that

you are so silly. I am very sad for that game and I have just understood why the (what you call them bad) people oppose you . . . I am looking forward to see you and to blame you about your foolish deeds, foolish deeds. . . . Your sad friend, Moh el Adl.'

In July Forster was granted ten days leave and went to stay with Masood in Hyderabad. He told K— to avoid the palace in his absence, but on his return H.H. broke the news to him that scandal had begun. K— had boasted in Deolekr's house that he was under Forster's protection. 'Sahib's fond of boys,' he had said, and the story had spread. Forster attacked K—, who begged forgiveness, but the harm was done; and he suspected that Deolekr, with whom he did not get on very well, might deliberately have fomented the scandal. And now, what he had imagined earlier, became the fact: the courtiers treated him less respectfully, and with an air of 'You're no better than we are, after all' — there was, he thought, a touch of racial vengeance in it. It bothered him less now, matters having gone so far. He felt in a vigorous and attacking mood; and when he heard that Bidwai, the Brahmin — one of the few courtiers he respected — knew of the scandal, he took him for a long walk, talking resolutely on indifferent topics, to show him he was determined to remain friends.

* * *

Just about this time, the Agent to the Governor General came on a state visit to Dewas,¹ and, as a result, Forster figured in a diplomatic incident. According to custom, the Maharaja began civilities by calling on the A.G.G. and his aides at the Guest House — much protocol being involved as to who took how many paces towards whom. The Dewas courtiers, Forster among them, then attended in the A.G.G.'s tent, where the visiting British ceremonially offered *itr*¹ and *pan*.² By now Forster's position at court had received official approval, but there was some doubt whether, on such a visitation, he should receive *itr* and *pan* at the hands of a British or of an Indian official. In the event, he was passed over by both. H.H., when he was told this, was furious. He took it as a calculated insult, designed to cast doubts on his right to employ a European, and the rest of the visit passed in glacial hostility. He told Forster to remove himself for a time, and when the P.A. inquired where he was, he

¹ Perfume.

² A masticatory composed of betel-leaf, areca nut and lime etc.

replied that he wasn't sure if he would return, he was 'rather out of spirits' – at which glances were exchanged among the British. When Forster finally did appear, he sat well away from the visitors. By contagion, he had begun to feel that he *had*, personally, been insulted, and when sought out by the P.A. and his Chief of Staff, he received their remarks about the weather with frigidity. A cheerless banquet and cinema-show followed, and when the A G G. who had hitherto ignored him¹ came to bid farewell, Forster pretended not to see his hand till it was offered a second time.

Next day there came an embarrassed apology from the Political Agent. H.H., however, was not appeased and took the matters to higher quarters, and the affair rumbled on for some months. He had a relish for such disputes – a fact which, in the end, helped to bring about his ruin. For Forster, the affair was opportune. He had, for a day, embodied the court's honour, and his stock rose in consequence.

* * *

There was now approaching the festival of *Gokul Ashtami*, an eight-day festival in honour of Krishna. The religious festivals were not all now kept up so lavishly at Dewas as once they had been, but *Gokul Ashtami*, the crowning event of the year, was still celebrated with much pomp, and the whole life of the state stopped for it. It was a festival in which priests took little part, the emphasis lying on *bhakti*, or direct union with the Divine through love, and much of the local ritual was of H.H.'s own invention. Each day had a different *mise-en-scène*, devised, in a sort of rivalry, by one or other of the state authorities – the Public Works Dept, the Army, the Dewan (Prime Minister) or the Maharaja himself. For the period of the festival the Court moved down to the Old Palace, which stood in the middle of the town. It was a fine eighteenth-century building, with a frescoed cloister and a grand Temple Room and Durbar Hall – though, to Forster's distress, the walls were hung with appalling chromolithographs cut from illustrated magazines. A room in the Old Palace was set aside for him, though the Maharaja urged him not to feel bound to attend the festival. Nothing might be killed during the eight days, but he was told he might eat tinned food if he consumed it elsewhere than in the Palace.

The preparations amused him and irritated him in about equal

¹ It is, of course, just conceivable that some echo had reached the A.G.G. of the fuss over Forster's intercepted letter to Masood (see pp. 28–9).

measure. He was feeling fretted and baffled by India and wrote to his Alexandrian friend Ludolf (28 July 1921) that he wished he were ten years younger, or that what he found so interesting did not also seem so silly.

The day before yesterday H.H., his wife, the Commander in Chief, etc., etc. sat on the floor for three hours choosing costumes for the Lord of the Universe, whose birthday falls next month. Luckily he is only six inches high, but he needs eight costumes of increasing splendour, and he has various companions of larger size, who have also to be dressed, and he has to have a bed, and he has to have a mosquito curtain, and the costumes will cost over £30 and the electric light will cost over £100, and his breakfast and dinner will cost a hell of a lot more and I just want a broom to sweep it all away, for it seems to me neither instructive or beautiful.

Nevertheless, as he knew, it was an extraordinary privilege to witness the coming scenes, and he determined to make the most of it, spending most of his days and nights at the Old Palace and, as activities began, adjusting his ears as best he could to the unceasing, fantastic, nerve-shattering din. His letters home, printed in *The Hill of Devi*, are deservedly famous. Here is one for 24 August 1921:

Old Palace
24 August

This ought to be an interesting letter. It is the fourth day of the Festival and I am getting along all right though I collapsed at first. The noise is so appalling. Hymns are sung to the altar downstairs without ceasing. The singers, in groups of eight, accompany themselves on cymbals and a harmonium. At the end of two hours a new group pushes in from the back. The altar has also a ritual which is independent of the singing. A great many gods are on visit and they all get up at 4.30 a.m. — they are not supposed to be asleep during the Festival, which is reasonable considering the din, but to be enjoying themselves. They have a bath and are anointed and take a meal, which is over about 9.0 a.m. At 12.0 is another service, during which three bands play simultaneously in the little courtyard, two native bands and one European, affecting a merry polka, while these united strains are pierced by an enormous curved horn, rather fine, which is blown whenever incense is offered. And still I am only at the beginning of the noise. Children play games all over the place, officials shout. Last night I had a dreadful dream about Verouka. I thought I had shown him a mechanical doll that frightened him so that he went mad and raced round and round in a room overhead. I woke up to find

it was the thudding of the old steam engine which we have tinkered up to drive our electric light – As I said, the noise was too much at first, but Bapu Sahib's¹ kindness and foresight for others never fail. I can always retire to the Guest House which is peaceful and now very beautiful since the Tank is full, and there is a complete staff of servants there and European food. I needn't stay here a moment longer than I like.

Well, what's it all about? It's called Gokul Ashtami – i.e. the 8 days feast in honour of Krishna who was born at Gokul near Muttra, and I cannot yet discover how much of it is traditional and how much due to H.H. What troubles me is that every detail, almost without exception, is fatuous and in bad taste. The altar is a mess of little objects, stifled with rose leaves, the walls are hung with deplorable oleographs, the chandeliers, draperies – everything bad. Only one thing is beautiful – the expression on the faces of the people as they bow to the shrine, and he himself is, as always, successful in his odd role. I have never seen religious ecstasy before and don't take to it more than I expected I should, but he manages not to be absurd. Whereas the other groups of singers stand quiet, he is dancing all the time, like David before the ark, jigging up and down with a happy expression on his face, and twanging a stringed instrument that hangs by a scarf round his neck. At the end of his two hours he gets wound up and begins composing poetry which is copied down by a clerk, and yesterday he flung himself flat on his face on the carpet. Ten minutes afterwards I saw him as usual, in ordinary life. He complained of indigestion but seemed normal and discussed arrangements connected with the motor-cars. I cannot see the point of this, or rather in what it differs from ordinary mundane intoxication. I suppose that if you believe your drunkenness proceeds from God it becomes more enjoyable. Yet I am very much muddled in my own mind about it all, for H.H. has what one understands by the religious sense and it comes out all through his life. He is always thinking of others and refusing to take advantage of his position in his dealings with them; and believing that his God acts similarly towards him.

The Old Palace is built round a courtyard about 50 feet square, the Temple-Hall being along one side on the ground floor. The Hall is open to the court and divided into three or four aisles by thick pillars. The singers stand at one end of the chief aisle, the shrine is at the other end, red carpet between. The public squats against the pillars and is controlled, of course incompetently, by schoolboy volunteers. The heat is immense and, since H.H. disdains adventitious comforts, he has the electric fans turned off when his time

¹ i.e. the Maharaja.

comes to sing. – I don't think I can describe it better than this, and it is difficult to make vivid what seems so fatuous. There is no dignity, no taste, no form, and though I am dressed as a Hindu I shall never become one. I don't think one ought to be irritated with Idolatry because one can see from the faces of the people that it touches something very deep in their hearts. But it is natural that Missionaries, who think these ceremonies wrong as well as inartistic, should lose their tempers.

Next week I shall have the crisis of the Festival to describe – the announcement of Krishna's birth (for he is not born yet!) and the procession from the Old Palace to the ~~Pank~~ Tank, where a clay model of the village of Gokul will be thrown into the waters, and so it will end. Before I forget, though, we none of us wear shoes or socks inside the O P. My feet suffered at first, but they can walk over heaps of coal now, as they have to whenever the Electric Light goes wrong. The costume is a turban (*sāfar*), a long coat, and a dhoti, which last resembles a voluminous yet not entirely efficient pair of bathing drawers. I have learnt to tie my own dhoti – the turban is much more difficult and I cannot acquire the knack. If you get the dhoti too short it is not thought elegant and if you get it too long you catch your bare foot in the folds and fall down.

My bedroom at the Old Palace is secluded (except for noise) since it is upstairs, through the Durbar Hall. This is fine – I described it in a letter eight years ago – and it is now free from mess, which has been carried below to adorn the Temple, so one can see its proportions. Nothing remains in it except the Gaddi, a sacred feather-bed with which the fortunes of the Dynasty are mysteriously connected. I am told – and I can well believe it – that some of the stuffing has been in that bed for generations. A row of little roses are placed on the bolster every day, and there are two lamps at night. H.H. comes up once in every twenty-four hours to worship the bed: except for this excursion he is forbidden to leave the ground floor of the Palace. I shall never be at an end of the queernesses. But give every place its due. There are no smells and (as far as I can testify) no bugs. It is the noise, the noise, the noise, the noise which sucks one into a whirlpool, from which there is no re-emerging. The whole of what one understands by music seems lost for ever, or rather seems never to have existed.

I am finishing at the Guest House! The Tank looks so pretty and if it does not rain I shall take the boat out.

* * *

During the festival, Forster discovered, K—'s indiscretion had taken a further turn; forming higher ambitions than his post with

Forster, he had made advances to the Maharaja himself. One night H.H. had found K— lying in the corner of his own bedroom. He had thought nothing of it – for in the Court no one, not even a prince, expected privacy – and had lain down to sleep, but after a few minutes K— had approached and begun massaging his feet, the conventional prelude to asking a favour. ‘Sirkar,’ he said, ‘can I have employment at the Palace?’ ‘But you have it already,’ the Maharaja had replied; ‘You are Forster’s Sahib’s barber.’ ‘Sirkar, I want employment with you. I want more employment. Sahib goes to bed with me.’ At this the Maharaja had bellowed ‘How dare you?’ and K— had fled in terror.

When H.H. told Forster, his fury at K—’s silliness overflowed, and the next time K— came, he boxed his ears, at which K— fell on the carpet, kissed his feet and loudly prayed for mercy. He then shaved Forster in the usual way, and Forster sent him away, determined to have no more to do with him. However, when he told H.H. this, H.H. warned him against too brusque a dismissal – it might arouse suspicion. Thus K— was allowed to continue his visits, and Forster resumed relations with him – finding, to his surprise and distaste, that he enjoyed giving K— pain. He did not really hurt him, but the emotion seemed to him a bad one, and harmful to himself. It was a feeling of omnipotence – himself a despot, whom no one could call to account, and K— his slave. The trouble was, he thought, K— had the soul of a slave.

A few days after *Gokul Ashtami*, H.H. set forth on tour. He was bound first for Nagpur, capital of the Central Provinces, where he was to preside over an All India Maratha Educational Conference – which, Forster surmised to Dickinson (30 August 1921), would mean ‘a damned lot of Marathas and bloody little education’. Nagpur was in British India, and the Dewas party made a triumphal entry there, mounted upon elephants and with a train of camels and riderless horses hung with rich caparisons. At the Fort, to H.H.’s gratification, they were received with a salute of fifteen guns. ‘A pathetic pageant,’ Forster wrote to his mother. ‘Under our feet were crowds of the Nagpur people, at present the most fanatical and anti-British in India, all contemptuous or indifferent, and many of them wearing the white Gandhi cap.’ Forster had the arranging of a garden party, a vast and successful affair, and when he brought garlands for the departing guests, the Maharaja turned and garlanded him with them.

instead. The royal party then set off for Simla, where the Maharaja had business with the Viceroy, hoping to persuade him to come to Dewas to inaugurate his Constitution. Forster, meanwhile, had been granted some leave and went off to stay with Rupert Smith in Agra.

Smith was now a Collector. He was married and was living in a large house in the civil station – a house he was rather proud of and was later annoyed to see vilified in *A Passage to India*.¹ Forster found him changed and, as he thought, much improved, no longer barking at his Indian subordinates: indeed the Smiths actually had an Indian friend staying in their house. The alteration struck Forster as symbolic. As he knew, a directive had gone out to the British that, in the new climate of liberal reform and 'dyarchy', they must be correct and courteous in all personal dealings with Indians. Masood was cynical about the change,² and Forster, likewise, considered it as 'a hasty and ungraceful change of position', too obviously inspired by fear of Gandhi. The new note in Anglo-Indian voices, he wrote to Dickinson (25 September 1921), was 'tragic resignation'. 'People pretend that they are leaving the country shortly, and so no longer feel it their duty to be rude to its inhabitants.' Later in the year he was to write an article³ for the *Nation and Athenaeum* on the theme of 'Too Late':

The Indian has taken up a new attitude. Ten or fifteen years ago he would have welcomed attention, not only because the English man in India had power, but because the etiquette and customs of the West, his inevitable destiny, were new to him and he needed a sympathetic introducer. He has never been introduced to the

¹ 'Then they reached their [the Turtons'] bungalow, low and enormous, the oldest and most uncomfortable bungalow in the civil station, with a sunk soup plate of a lawn.' (*A Passage to India*, chapter 3.)

² He told Forster a story which Forster repeated in 'Reflections in India'. (*The Nation and Athenaeum*, 21 January 1922.) He had got into a railway carriage, occupied by an English officer, and – as against his experiences in earlier days – the officer had sprung up politely, and begun to shift his kit, saying, 'Here, take my berth, it's the best; I'm getting out soon.' 'No, why should I?' said Masood. 'Oh, no, take it, man, that's all right; this is your country, not mine,' said the officer. Masood rejoined grimly: 'Don't do this sort of thing, please. We don't appreciate it any more than the old sort. We know that you have been told you must do it.'

³ 'Reflections in India, 1: Too Late?' (By our Indian correspondent)', *Nation & Athenaeum*, 21 January 1922.

West in the social sense, as to a possible friend We have thrown grammars and neckties at him, and smiled when he put them on wrongly – that is all. For a time he suffered . . . Today he has ceased to suffer. He has learnt to put on neckties the right way, or his own way, or whatever one is supposed to do with a necktie

For the remaining week of his leave, Forster had invited himself to Chhatarpur. He had been in correspondence with Chhatarpur for some months. The Maharaja,¹ hearing of his appointment at Dewas, had instantly set his heart on Forster's coming to his own court instead, offering him twice the salary. Forster's refusal had piqued him, and he had shown no great enthusiasm for Forster's projected visit. He greeted Forster with effusion, however. He called on him at 6 a.m. on the morning after his arrival and launched at once upon his favourite topic, his quest for a companion. Recently he had been much struck by the hero Olaf in Rider Haggard's novel *The Wanderer's Necklace* and had written to the author begging him to find him a secretary as like to Olaf as possible. Rider Haggard had done as he was asked, but his protégé had had to withdraw, and the Maharaja had then written to Sir Theodore Morison, in Weybridge, asking him to suggest a candidate. Sir Theodore, however, had not replied. The court astrologers were of the opinion that the letter had not reached him, but Forster told Dickinson, 'My mother gives a different account.'

There had been changes in Chhatarpur. The Maharaja had been forced to give up most of his retinue of boy-actors, retaining (or so he said) only one beautiful and melancholy-looking youth known as 'the last of the Krishnas'. Even to employ the last of the Krishnas required discretion. The Maharaja sent him to visit Forster at the Guest House but punished him when he learned with what ostentation he had gone – accompanied by a horse (which he could not ride) and wearing diamond earrings. Forster enquired, 'Has he any friends of his own age?' The Maharaja replied, with great satisfaction: 'None.'

Forster and the Maharaja had philosophical conversations in which, Forster told Dickinson, he cut more of a figure in Dickinson's absence. The Maharaja had been corresponding with Bertrand Russell, and the letters were fetched for Forster's inspection. Russell was 'helpful but firm', Forster told Dickinson (25 September 1921):

¹ See Vol. 1, pp. 234-7.

— regretted that he had not read G H Lewes but believed him to be inferior to Herbert Spencer — denied that the universe has any consideration for man but equally denied to man the right to neglect his own hopes and ideals since this would be ‘to bow before an alien power’. He left the Maharajah in a tight hole in fact. But every Indian hole has at least two exits . . .

Chhatarpur and its environs seemed even more beautiful to Forster than on his visit nine years before. ‘You cannot imagine what aesthetic peace I am finding here,’ he wrote to Dickinson. ‘The sense of beauty, which Dewas daily outrages, is soothed by every turn of the architecture, every clean floor, and white washed wall. It is like those first ten minutes after a toothache has stopped.’ After many false starts, an expedition was made to the famous temples at Khajuraho, and on another day the Maharaja took Forster once more to the ruined lake-palace at Mau, of which he had once offered him the possession

On their homeward journey from Mau, a mild frost developed between Forster and his host. Forster refused to answer some questions about a third party, causing the Maharaja to say that he was not his friend. Then a woodpecker cried from an ill-omened direction, and the Maharaja, shuddering, pulled the whole of the travelling-rug away from Forster and wrapped himself up in it. On their arrival back in Chhatarpur, the Maharaja left Forster to walk the slope up to the Guest House instead of driving him to the door, and Forster, knowing that this ‘would not do’ in India, riposted with a note cutting short his visit. All was quickly forgotten, however, and in a letter which followed Forster to Dewas, the Maharaja wrote that the days he had spent in Forster’s company were ‘as if I had been in the company of an angel!!’ (Forster noted on the letter, ‘I felt one some times, too.’)

Upon his return to Dewas, Forster found awaiting him a letter from Colonel Leslie, his predecessor as private secretary, a letter which amazed him greatly and even more greatly enraged him. It ran:

London
6 September 1921

Dear Mr Forster,

In thanking you for your note received about a week ago, I am sorry I have no time to reply except on a very important subject.

You enclosed the contents of a cover addressed to me by name, and with no mention even of my official job.

I know that some people feel when they get east of Suez that not only the ten commandments are obsolete but also the obligations and etiquette of English society. You had twice before opened my private letters, but on the second occasion – a letter addressed most obviously by an English lady – you felt some qualms as to your action and I refrained from remark. These qualms now seem to have subsided. I can only think that the hypnotic power of your surroundings has affected you, but as I may now have a number of private letters awaiting my arrival, may I ask you most kindly to refrain from opening them, and if you think H H wishes you to act otherwise kindly obtain written authority in each case.

Yours sincerely

W Leslie

The letter 'threw' Forster badly. He had felt some sympathy for the colonel, but this all dissolved now in desire for revenge. He went straight with the letter to the Maharaja, who met him with the news that Leslie was coming to Dewas – sailing on the same boat as the Darlings. Leslie had written, said H H., that he meant to do no more administrative work, as it was plainly not appreciated, but he would continue to supervise the young Prince's education. 'It's an unpleasant letter,' said H.H. 'So is this,' said Forster grimly, showing him his own H.H., reading it, was all concern. He insisted on Forster's taking another holiday and sent him off in a Palace car to visit a cousin, the Maharaja of Dhar. Thus for two days Forster went sightseeing, visiting the ruined city of Mandu, a romantic and magnificent site high up in the Vindhya mountains, but all day long what occupied his mind was not scenery but the answer he should return to Colonel Leslie. Should it be elaborately ironical, he wondered? Or genial and facetious? Neither, he decided, and on his return he composed what he called 'a stinker'.

Dewas Senior

7 October 1921

Dear Colonel Leslie,

I have received your letter of September 6th and will hand to H.H. any of your correspondence that may precede you at Dewas. Your bicycle and lamp, hitherto in my room, will be given to Malarao Sahib.

As regards your private letters, opened by me, I herewith make the following statement. I opened them in the belief that they were of an official nature, bearing on my work. Finding that they were not, I did not read them. I have no knowledge as to their

contents, nor, until you informed me, was I aware of the sex of your correspondents.

If you believe the above statement, I demand from you a full and unqualified apology for your letter of September 6th, as regards both its matter and its manner. If you do not believe it, I neither expect nor desire to hear from you again.

A copy of this correspondence will be forwarded to Mr Darling. It is on his account that I provide you with this opportunity for apologizing

Yours sincerely,
E. M. Forster.

Since Leslie was coming to Dewas, he himself, Forster told H H., must clearly go, for it would not do for them to meet. H H. agreed – though regretfully, for he was as delighted as ever with Forster's company. It was a harassing time all round for the Maharaja. He had at last had to admit the disastrous state of his finances. He had countermanded all work on the Palace and its gardens and had spent a humiliating day in Indore chaffering with money-lenders. Then, it appeared that the Viceroy would *not* come to inaugurate his Constitution. Also the Dowager Maharani was, as usual, stirring up trouble. And he was much worried as to what Malcolm Darling, such a close friend of Colonel Leslie's, would think of the quarrel and of his own behaviour to Leslie. Yet another festival, *Dessera*, was approaching, and H.H. felt in no mood for it. He told Forster that, for the festivities, he meant to dress in white, the symbol of depression.

Dessera, traditionally, marked the return of the cold weather, when warfare might begin again, and it celebrated the nation's possessions and its military might. It would be a shabby affair this year – nothing to the splendid spectacle which Darling had witnessed fourteen years before. The central event was a torchlight procession to a Tree of Victory, planted for the occasion outside the city boundary. Beneath this tree the Dewan sat and recited the list of the state's possessions – which, according to his statement, included an enormous army, thousands of bows and millions of arrows, and numerous battle elephants. The Maharaja's empire, according to the Dewan, extended from Lahore in the north to Poona in the south and Bengal in the east; Forster asked H.H. why he did not, as did the Maharaja of Udaipur, claim the whole of India while he was about it, but H.H. said there was 'no precedent' for this. During the festival,

Forster had to officiate as a priest. Under the direction of his clerk, he first worshipped a pen, an inkpot and a wastepaper basket, offering them and his clerk a sacrament of cocoanut, then, proceeding to the Electric House, he did the same for the switchboard, dynamo and battery, and for the mechanics. 'One has not to say anything, still less to feel,' he told Florence Barger (13 October 1921) 'Just wave incense and sprinkle water and dab with red powder anything you like. V. easy.'

Meanwhile, there had been a fresh development in the Leslie affair. Messages came that he was not travelling on the Darling's boat, but the following one, and – though this was to be a secret – that he was engaged to be married 'Am I to support his wife too?' H.H. asked indignantly; and he determined, if he could, to prevent Leslie from coming. This could not be done without consulting Darling; thus, someone would have to meet the Darlings' boat at Bombay; and since H.H. was busy, the emissary had to be Forster. It proved a curious expedition. The ship arrived at Bombay on the Sunday, and at midnight, while it still stood out in the harbour, Forster hired a boat and went on board, bearing numerous garlands.¹ Darling, when Forster showed him the letters between Leslie and himself, looked grave 'A lamentable correspondence,' he said, and there was worse to follow, for Forster had to explain that H.H. now refused to have Leslie back in Dewas. Darling grew heated at this, declaring that it would kill Leslie, or at any rate break his heart; and moreover it was too late – he was already on his way. Many telegrams flew between the ship and Dewas, and, since Darling was due in the Punjab, it was arranged that Forster and the Darlings should get on the Punjab Mail, and that H.H. should join them up the line, for further discussions. The Maharaja did duly join the train – 'almost alone', as he had promised – that is to say with five courtiers and several servants – and the whole party travelled aimlessly onwards across India, debating the Leslie problem. 'Answer this one question, Malcolm,' said H.H. 'If I put him off now, shall I be behaving in an ungentlemanly fashion?' Malcolm considered and

¹ There were nine brides on board, he told his mother (25 October 1921), and he was mistaken by each of them for the bridegroom of one of the other eight. 'Josie is sure that the marriage of all will be permanently embittered by the remembrance; each will think, whenever she looks at her husband, "He failed to board the boat when a stray man succeeded"'

replied: 'I know nothing you do could be ungentlemanly, but it will certainly be considered so by other English people who hear of it.' 'No matter,' replied H.H. imperiously 'Their opinion is not of the least importance I cable at the next stopping-place.' The Darlings received this frostily, and the Dewas party got out at a remote station, where Forster was made to draft the cable. It was long but began 'Owing to temporary financial difficulties in my state am reluctantly compelled to forgo pleasure of having European officer.'

This confused episode was the last of Forster's experiences as a courtier. He returned to Dewas with H.H., but mainly in order to pack – his plan being to spend some last weeks in India with Masood in Hyderabad. The Maharaja was eager for him to stay, now that the way was clear, however, it was not certain that their telegram would reach Leslie, or that it would stop him if it did.¹ Moreover it seemed to Forster the right moment to go; his usefulness to H.H., never very great, was at an end. The Maharaja was disconsolate, making many speeches of affection and decorating him with the Tukojirao III Gold Medal, the second highest honour of the State. Forster was dissatisfied with himself. He felt he had been a trouble to H.H. – though it was true, this had brought them together, which was a gain. He was disturbed, too, by the memory of his own panic and disorder. Also, he foresaw with distress that H.H., so rare, so brilliant, so incompetent, was doomed to disaster. 'We were very melancholy,' he wrote to his mother (12 November 1921):

I hated leaving him, but it is his tragedy not to know how to employ people, and I could not feel it any use to go on muddling with work that gave me no satisfaction, and was of no essential importance to him. The things of this life mean so little to him – mean something so different anyway – I never feel certain what he likes, or even whether he likes me: consideration for others so often simulates affection in him. I only know that he is one of the sweetest and saintliest men I have ever known . . .

* * *

After the heat and confusions of Dewas, Forster's last two months in India were a relief, and a very carefree and delightful time. The relief came, partly, from his being among Mohammedans. He felt he

¹ The telegram seems to have done its work, for Col. Leslie never reappeared in Dewas.

understood Mohammedans, as he did not understand Hindus. 'The Hindu character is almost incomprehensible to us,' he wrote to his Aunt Laura Forster (6 November 1921).

The more I know the less I understand. With the Mohammedans it is different. When after the nightmare of Gokul Ashtami, I stood on the minaret of the Taj in Agra, and hear the evening call to prayer from the adjacent mosque, I knew at all events *where* I stood and *what* I heard; it was a land that was not merely atmosphere but had definite outlines and horizons. So with the Mohammedan friends of Masood whom I am meeting now. They may not be as subtle or suggestive as the Hindus, but I can follow what they are saying.

He found Masood in tearing spirits, surrounded by friends, busy with all sorts of schemes and full of plans for his own entertainment. Masood was now an influential personage in Hyderabad, and, as Director of Public Instruction, was well placed to continue his grandfather's work for the Muslim cause. (He was playing a large part in the planning of Hyderabad's new Osmania University, the first Indian university to employ a native language – Urdu – for its teaching.) His wife Zorah and children were away when Forster arrived, so the two had the run of the house and lived in the zenana, sleeping side by side on a vine-shaded verandah. In the morning, clients and suppliants arrived in throngs, by bicycle, horse, carriage or motorcar, until the front drive looked like the approach to a racecourse.

Masood had commanded various old companions, like Sherwani and the Mirza brothers,¹ to join him in Hyderabad. Apart from them, his closest friends were Sir Akbar Hydari and his wife Amina Bibi. Sir Akbar was the Nizam's Finance Minister and one of the most powerful figures in the state.² He had been the instigator of the Osmania University. Though hostile to Congress, he was a modernizer, and he and his wife had fought the *purdah* system; her abandonment of *purdah* was still a scandal to their neighbours, who would spy on her with binoculars. Forster became friendly with both, but especially with Amina Bibi, a humourless and censorious but exceedingly kind and sensitive woman. The Hydaris and their children, Forster told

¹ See Vol. I, p. 202 and *passim*.

² His name became known outside India when he led the Hyderabad delegation to the Round Table Conference in 1930-2.

his mother, were the plainest family he had ever seen: ' . . . thick lips, huge chins, and noses on which gold spectacles do rest, crimped black hair, clumsy feet.' Another friend among the high officials was the Nawab Nizameth Jung. Forster was taken to dinner with him and was struck by his perfect impersonation of the English gentleman and scholar. They dined in the garden, where the Nawab was building a 'retreat' in the style of the Parthenon, 'He is an oracular and cultured talker,' Forster told his mother (1 December 1921), 'and his idea of happiness is to exclude reality, which may indicate a guilty conscience. We praised Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus and other celebrated back numbers and stuffed ourselves full of pilau, also discussing the stars.'

The favourite topic of the Nawab and the Hydaris, as of everyone else, was the appallingness of the Nizam: his meanness, his cruelty, his tyranny and misgovernment. Even court officials spoke quite openly on the subject, though the Nizam employed innumerable spies, no important household being without one (At the Masoods, the chauffeur and two other servants were known spies.) The fact was, Forster reported to his mother, 'the cat can't be more out of the bag than it is'. Moreover, the spies' reports were so voluminous, and implicated so many people, the Palace could scarcely have acted on them all even had it wanted to.

There was much talk everywhere of the forthcoming visit of the Prince of Wales, due to begin in November. Almost all Masood's friends, though they were pro-British, thought the visit a mistake. And in fact, from the moment of the Prince's coming, it proved a disaster, riots and boycottings being provoked by it, and the Prince, on several occasions, having to make a royal progress through empty streets.¹ There was a ripple of protest in Hyderabad itself, the boys at a local school absenting themselves *en masse* on the day of the Prince's arrival. Forster wrote to his mother (20 December 1921):

To the educated Indian, whatever his opinions, this ill-omened visit does seem an impertinence. You can't solve real complicated and ancient troubles by sending out a good-tempered boy; besides, this naive slap-the-back method, though the very thing for our colonies, scarcely goes down in the East. People talk about his

¹ The Prince wrote to the Secretary of State for India, Edwin Montagu, complaining 'India is no longer a place for the white man to live in.' (S. D. Waley, *Edwin Montagu* (1964), p. 262.)

safety – but not about what he *is* or *says* or *does* all that is ignored. It is just a piece of luggage that must be carried about carefully.

He published a biting article on this theme, 'The Prince's Progress', in the *Nation and Athenaeum* in January, describing the Prince as 'the chatty, handy type of monarch, which the West is producing rather against time, and of which the King of the Belgians is the leading example.'

He was eager to see Bidar and to buy some of its famous inlaid metal work, and Masood took him on a three-day trip there, leaving Forster to go sight-seeing while he and a colleague, Ali Akbar, inspected local schools. Forster remembered it as a time of great happiness, wandering alone in this red-walled city, its ancient cannon half smothered in cactuses and the air thronged with brilliant birds and butterflies. He was studying the Indian birds and would be out of doors in the early morning, before Masood and his friend had woken, identifying species in his *Birds of India*.

In December, when Masood made a visitation of schools in south-western Hyderabad, the three of them made a longer trip together, witnessing the ruins of many empires: Hindu, Moslem and British. The scene at Lingsagur, till 1860 a British cantonment, impressed Forster. He wrote to Ludolf (11 December 1921):

A civilization, however silly, is touching as soon as it passes away, and I sit on the stucco curve of what was once a band stand, or wander through ruined halls of bungalows that once smelt of whisky and echoed to giggles, or read in the tombs in the cemetery that the 'dearly beloved sweet gentle wife of Captain Pedley' has 'gone before'.

Masood's tour ended at Gangavati – crowds gathering there to cheer this eminent visitor – and then, in bullock-carts lent by the Rani of Anegundi, they set out for Hampi, the ancient capital of the Vijayanagar kings, crossing the Tungabhadra river – a fierce and rocky stream in a gorge – in 'immense bowls of wicker work, coated with leather and propelled by a savage with a paddle'. On this trip, Forster came out as a most determined sightseer. On their way to Gangavati they noticed a fort on the top of a hill, and he insisted on their visiting it. They enquired the way from a policeman, who said the path was entirely blocked by cactuses; however, Forster was not to be deterred, saying curtly: 'I will take the risk.' Masood began to get angry: 'Morgan, you are impossible,' he said. 'You can go if you

like, but Akbar and I are not coming.' So, with the policeman and a couple of villagers, Forster set off up the hill. Twenty minutes later he was back, groaning and covered from head to foot in cactus thorns, and they had to hurry him off to a doctor.¹

It was altogether a cheerful time for Forster. By now – it was a comfort – he felt he need have no secrets about his sex-life from Masood and told him the K— episode. Masood gave him advice, and would tease him in a way he enjoyed: 'Morgan, will you never change? . . . Morgan, the time has come for me to take you to a woman,' etc. They bickered amicably. Masood told Forster he was impossibly wilful. Also, he complained, he was too taciturn and would not put himself out in company. On Christmas day, taking Forster to dinner with an English colleague, he implored him; 'Do try to be a success this time.' 'So I pulled myself together,' Forster told his mother (28 December 1921), 'drank plenty of wine, and interrupted everyone's conversation, which is, I have discovered, the simplest way of producing animation, and they were all delighted. If Masood gave me wine I should be noisier at his parties, but that he does not know.' On his birthday, there was a charming scene, which he reported to his mother:

As I lay in bed drinking tea at 7.30, fortunately in my grand dressing-gown – Masood reclining near – three small boys in white robes and astrachan caps entered throwing roses, followed by 2 young men doing ditto, 2 ditto Mohammedan maidens, 3 Mohammedan matrons, and finally old Hydar, and another gentleman and a tray of oranges, apples, bananas, sweets, and (but this didn't come off) a bomb which ought to have exploded under my bedroom window and didn't.

The same evening, returning from a banquet at the Hydaris, he found his room like a bridal chamber: flowering shrubs pinned on the curtains, and his whole bed and dressing-table strewn and festooned with rose-leaves. He did not yet feel India a 'success', in the sense of restoring his power of writing, but – remembering his chagrins at Dewas – he told himself 'I never thought to end this year so well.'

* * *

¹ Related by Ali Akbar in an article, 'E. M. Forster in India', in the *Illustrated Weekly of India*, 18 October 1970.

He had booked his return passage for early in January, planning to spend a week or two with Mohammed in Egypt. Egypt was in state of crisis, with daily shootings and anti-British demonstrations – so much so that he wondered if he would be allowed to land. He put off his journey for a little, but in the end there seemed no point in waiting, and – much fêted and garlanded by Masood and his friends – he set off, reaching Port Said on the 23rd. There was no trouble about landing, but what greeted him was grim. Instead of Mohammed in person he found a letter from him announcing that he was ill, and, on making his way to Mohammed's home at Mansourah, he found him far gone in consumption and evidently dying. He took him off to Cairo, to see a specialist, but the doctor gave no hope at all, and they had to face the fact that in a few weeks or months he would be dead.

It remained for Forster to do what he could for Mohammed in the days left to him. Mohammed's daughter was also ill, and was in hospital, so, leaving Gamila to look after her, Forster took Mohammed off to Helouan, a health-resort on the Nile above Cairo, and found some furnished lodgings for them, where the family could join him later. Mohammed was penniless, and Forster wondered how best to help him over money, guessing that if he gave him a lump sum the doctors would soon strip him of it. The best plan was a monthly allowance, and he again cursed his failure to find an 'agent' to transmit money and relay news: Furness had proved useless, and he wrote to the kindly Ludolf to prepare him for the role. He felt strong and capable and angry at the political forces which, so he felt, had helped to kill Mohammed. He wrote to Dickinson (28 January 1922): 'I can look no Egyptian in the face. Their hostility is obvious, and they obstruct one in various little ways, and would do more if they dared. It is odious being in this country. India absolutely different, for there we have committed no comprehensive wrong.'

His few days with Mohammed at Helouan turned out unexpectedly happy. Mohammed was well enough to come for brief expeditions, and on one of them they bought Gamila a silk shawl, proposing to pretend that Forster had brought it for her from India. Forster asked Mohammed why he did not educate her more, but he replied contentedly: 'She is very nice and good to me, and I enjoy her talk and am most fond of her, but her head is empty and it is too late to fill it.' 'But you are filling it with lies,' said Forster. 'All is the same,' said Mohammed, 'as long as she gets the silk.' Forster described the

scene in their room on one of these last days, in a letter to Florence Barger:

He is asleep now – tried to read the proofs of my Alexandrian book with excellent effect. Now and then I shoo the flies off his face which is unaltered and a very nice one. You wouldn't know that he is ill . . .

Feel very fit and damned competent.

5 *A Passage to India*

It proved a difficult homecoming for him. Mohammed's coming death lay heavy on his mind. He awaited it calmly, but it was painful concealing his feelings about it from his mother. The pain was another reminder of his imprisonment with her, and in his present mood his home, and the sight of England generally, depressed him. He wrote to Ludolf: 'It's like a person who has folded her hands and stands waiting. I do think that during the war something in this country got killed.'

His deepest trouble lay in the knowledge that even now, he was still balked as a novelist and that India had not released him. Calling on the Woolfs a week or so after his return, he struck Virginia as 'depressed to the verge of inanition'. He chatted with them dispiritedly about the sparrows that flew about the Dewas palace ('I used to shout at them sometimes') and how squirrels sat on the piano. He told them he didn't believe any more in native states but felt no enthusiasm at seeing the cliffs of England again. Then, wrote Virginia Woolf (12 March 1922), 'Off he went, carrying a very heavy metal plate, to dine with Aunt Rosalie at Putney.' She felt sorry for him.

To come back to Weybridge, to come back to an ugly house a mile from the station, an old, fussy, exacting mother, to come back having lost your Rajah, without a novel, and with no power to write one – this is dismal, I expect, at the age of 43. The middle age of buggers is not to be contemplated without horror . . .

Over the next fortnight his depression grew, becoming crippling, so that he felt he could hardly face people. It seemed to him his life was at a crisis; and he asked advice from Leonard Woolf, always a

support to friends in such moments Woolf gave him lunch and talked to him at length, arguing that at all costs he must go on with his half-written novel, regardless whether it could be published or not, for if he did not do so, he could never be sure it was a failure. This was probably the advice he wanted. At all events, he took it and now summoned up all his courage to resume writing. As a first step, on Woolf's advice, he gave up reviewing. But he also took a more drastic step: he decided to burn his indecent short stories. The burning took place early in April and was done, he told himself,¹ not as a moral repentance but out of a feeling that ~~the~~ stories 'clogged' him artistically. They were 'a wrong channel' for his pen.

The novel now began slowly to advance. The fact that he had begun it before the war presented a difficulty – for, of course, Anglo-India had changed very fast over the last decade. But it was also a challenge. And he resolved the problem by making it a novel 'out of time' – neither precisely pre-war nor precisely post-war, and deliberately free from direct political reference. In tone it would be darker than the novel originally planned – for he felt bitter against the British after Amritsar, and less in love with Indians too. He wrote to Masood (27 September 1922):

When I began the book I thought of it as a little bridge of sympathy between East and West, but this conception has had to go, my sense of truth forbids anything so comfortable. I think that most Indians, like most English people, are shuts, and I am not interested whether they sympathize with one another or not. Not interested as an artist; of course the journalistic side of me still gets roused over these questions . . .

What he could not change was the manners and tone of his Anglo-Indians, and these – as critics were to point out – remained irredeemably pre-war.

A different kind of difficulty was that he had come to feel bored with orthodox fictional form. He told Dickinson (8 May 1922) that he was tired of the convention that one must view the action through the mind of one of the characters.

If you can pretend you can get inside one character, why not pretend it about all the characters? I see why. The illusion of life may vanish, and the creator degenerate into the showman. Yet some change of the sort must be made. The studied ignorance of novelists grows wearisome.

¹ Diary, 8 April 1922.

There may have been, here, some influence from Proust, for, while in Marseilles on his return from India, he had bought *Du Côté de Chez Swann* and had read it with excitement. In his diary for 7 May he noted: 'Have made careful & uninspiring additions to my Indian novel, influenced by Proust.' Sometimes, too, he felt there was a basic defect in his Indian novel. It was that, as he told Ludolf (13 June 1922), 'the characters are not sufficiently interesting for the atmosphere. This tempts me to emphasize the atmosphere, and so to produce a meditation rather than a drama'

He pressed on, doggedly with the writing, wanting at times to 'spit or scream like a maniac'; and by mid-May he was able to show some two-thirds of the novel to Arnold's, who were enthusiastic. The following month he received an unexpected boost to his confidence. *The Times* reviewer, writing of 'Lucas Malet'¹ and her latest volume, *Da Silva's Widow, and Other Stories*, remarked that there was hardly one of her stories which did not carry a reminder of some other author, and in one or two cases the author was 'Mr E. M. Forster of *The Celestial Omnibus*' 'Lucas Malet' replied (8 June 1922), saying that she could hardly be guilty of plagiarism from E. M. Forster, since she had never heard of him. And at this, several admirers of Forster wrote in, testifying to their love and admiration for his books. Frank Sidgwick, profiting from the occasion, offered to send a free copy of *The Celestial Omnibus* (1911) to any British novelist 'who, in our judgement, is as distinguished a writer as "Lucas Malet", if that novelist will make a similar public confession in your columns that he or she has never heard of Mr E. M. Forster'; and *The Times*, on 17 June 1922, published a rather solemn profile or 'Medallion' of him. It said that 'Mr Forster of *Howards End* and the short stories is a man who has something of the vision that has received its most unhesitating and masterful expression in the music of Beethoven.' As a result of this unlooked-for publicity, Forster received a stream of enquiries from agents and publishers and many letters from unknown admirers.

* * *

The news of Mohammed continued to be melancholy. In March he wrote, telling Forster 'I think we shall meet each other if not in the world it will be in the heaven'; and in April there was another gloomy

¹ Pseudonym of the novelist Mary St Leger Harrison.

letter, causing Forster to confide in his diary, with self-knowledge: 'I want him to tell me that he is dead, and so set me free to make an image of him. Latterly my great love prevents my feeling he is real.' In the same realistic vein, he noted, a few days later: 'Determined my life should contain one success I have concealed from myself and others M's frequent coldness to me. And his occasional warmth may be due to politeness, gratitude, or pity. The prospect of his death gives me no pain.'

A despairing letter from Mohammed arrived, dated 6 May

Dear Morgan
I am sending you the photograph
I am very bad
I got nothing more to say
The family are good. My compliments to mother
My love to you
My love to you
My love to you
do not forget your ever friend

Moh el adl

It was followed by another, dated two days later

Dear Morgan
I have got the money today from you and thank you very much
for it. I am absolutely bad I don't go out I can't stand
I am very weak
How are you no more today
My love to you
My love to you

By the time that Forster received the letters, Mohammed was in fact already dead. Forster had guessed as much; and on 17 May there arrived a letter from Mohammed's brother to confirm it. In further letters, Forster was told that Mohammed had died possessed of three houses and £60. He did not believe it about the houses; all the same, it crossed his mind that Mohammed might not have been straight with him over money. He noted on 17 June (perhaps recording a dream): 'His ghost as one needing forgiveness came out from the curtain in a sort of way, conceived of as taller than normal.' Mohammed had bequeathed him a ring, and he wrote to a friend of Mohammed's asking him to forward it. Inwardly, however, he told himself that he did not much mind if it came. 'The affair has treated me very gently.'

Alexandria: A History and a Guide, had even now not appeared. He had written the publishers various 'stingers' and had set Ludolf on to them, but to no avail. By now he had ceased to speculate when it might come out and had decided that, in any event, there should be no English edition. The thought, however, occurred to him that he might construct a second Alexandrian book, making use of his wartime journalism in the *Egyptian Mail* and elsewhere. He suggested the project to the Woolfs, who were enthusiastic, and it was agreed that they should publish it at the Hogarth Press. For him it represented a kind of tribute to Mohammed, and he gave the book a dedication - 'Ερμην ψυχοπομπῶν' (To Hermes, leader of souls)' which alluded cryptically to him. This concept of 'Hermes, leader of souls' was a cherished private cult of Forster's, symbolizing the aid that one soul can give another. It had first been inspired, it may be guessed, by the Greek sculpture in the British Museum of a beautiful Hermes escorting Alcestis to the underworld.¹

He was now outwardly much restored in spirits. Virginia Woolf found him 'very calm, serene, like a kettle boiling by some private fire'.² He saw a good deal of the Woolfs at this time, on business or otherwise, and was active in the Memoir Club. On a weekend at the Bells' house at Charleston he went for a walk with Duncan Grant and, rather uncharacteristically, talked about his own work: how his new novel was to have a great central nave, a succession of side-chapels and a lady-chapel at the end.³

In May, Lady Ottoline Morrell invited him to come to Garsington for a weekend, giving him the choice of meeting Eliot or Wyndham Lewis. He replied (perhaps associating her in his mind with Mme Verdurin) in the style of *A la recherche du temps perdu*:

Dear Lady Ottoline,

I come.

I have always wanted to see both Lewis and Eliot, and though the longer I see them the unlikelyer I am to meet them, this is after all but a subordinate clause in the career of one who, despite considerable delay, (due partly to idleness, partly to impecuniosity, partly to the hope that the object of this sentence—who will finally be mentioned in strict accordance with the rules of Grammar,

¹ See back of jacket. Conceivably this was the 'wonderful boy with the broken arm' which he refers to in his diary in 1904. (See Vol. 1, p. 110.)

² Virginia Woolf's diary, 2 June 1922.

³ Information from Duncan Grant

and possibly even upon this page – would have been forgotten in Europe before the subject of it returned to Asia) is reading Proust. I shall eat, I shall eat, I shall eat, and, then, quite suddenly and naturally, I shall break silence by a little noise which is really the height of Oriental good manners, but which Lewis will regard as insolent, and consequently respect. And all will be well

He chose the Wyndham Lewis weekend and found Lewis, as he had foreseen, 'a curious mixture of insolence and nervousness'. They got on amicably, however. On the first day, at least thirty guests were expected to tea, and Forster and Lewis, though expected to 'perform', escaped and went for a walk. Lady Ottoline was piqued. 'So like life,' she murmured. Mark Gertler the painter was also there – 'a little East End Jew, very amusing and clever', Forster told his mother, 'exactly like a street boy who makes faces at the people in carriages and imitates their gestures. He and W[yndham] L[ewis] were frightened of, and frightened, the high-born undergraduates, who motored out, gasping and undulating, from Oxford.' H. J. Massingham, the editor of the *Nation*, was expected next day, and, since Lewis had quarrelled with him, Lady Ottoline was expecting explosions. She drifted about, 'wondering what will happen, wishes she could *understand* people, wishes they were more simple etc., clad the meantime herself in elaborate floating dresses of all the colours of the rainbow.' Lady Ottoline had heard rumours of Mohammed and kept loudly fishing for confidences, evidently regarding it as an occasion for Bloomsbury truth-telling. Forster was upset and resentful, and in the succeeding months he begged friends, such as Sassoon, never to discuss him at Garsington. 'Whenever you want information about me,' he told Sassoon (26 March 1923), 'it is always to be had at first hand.'

Forster's acquaintance with the Hardys, engineered by Sassoon, had flourished, and this July, as several times later, he went down on a visit to Max Gate. He wondered about his own motives, a little; for as a conversationalist he found Hardy very boring. Especially so about books. Forster determined, on this visit, to keep the talk away from books, and he did quite well, with topics like the discomfort of charabancs and whether 'chicken' was a singular or a plural. However, eventually Hardy sensed his drift and, Forster told Sassoon, 'with commendable pique he insisted on revealing the secrets of his art'. Forster noticed how anxious Hardy was to make a

good impression, no matter upon whom. While they were having tea, a reporter was announced, at which Hardy sprang up with alacrity, saying 'Reporters are very important people, you know.' Being very deaf, he had not heard the reporter's knock, but the dog 'Wessie', who had, had given a bark. Hardy, in a tone of significance, said 'They know,' as if Wessie had displayed some preternatural faculty. Someone had said that Wessie looked like Robert Bridges, and Hardy, who was envious of Bridges, repeated this with relish. (Forster later remembered this with pleasure, when Bridges, who was envious of Hardy, said to him, when preparing an anthology of recent verse: 'I tried to find two poems by Hardy to include, but I couldn't, you know, I really couldn't'.¹) Hardy showed Forster the graves of his pets, each with a headstone, now overgrown with ivy. They all seemed to have come to violent ends. 'This is Snowball - she was run over by a train. . . This is Pella, the same thing happened to her. . This is Kitkin, she was cut clean in two . . .' Forster asked 'How is it, Mr Hardy, that so many of your cats have been run over? Is the railway near?' 'Not at all near, not at all near. I don't know how it is. . . . But of course we have only buried those pets whose bodies were recovered. Many were never seen again.' Forster, reporting the scene to his mother (19 July 1922) said he could hardly keep grave, it was so like one of Hardy's novels or poems.

* * *

All through 1922, as he worked on his novel, the British empire and its misdeeds were much on Forster's mind. During September Lloyd George nearly brought the country to war with Turkey, over her seizure of Chanak, a British outpost in the neutralized zone of the Straits. The war, so it was said in some quarters, was a debt owed to the British war-dead in the Dardanelles. This chauvinist appeal

¹ When Bridges refused to be a pall-bearer at Hardy's funeral, Forster wrote some lines on the occasion, in a letter to Roger Fry, later copied into his *Commonplace Book*.

Twas breakfast at Boar's Hill one January morn;
Woe wimples the housewife, awake to the menace
Of burial bell from far Peter's monastery,
Where with undue pomp and excessive attendance
Of Jack and his apes rhymster Hodge is enterrèd.
All windows she hath shut, all newspapers withheld,
Blaming this icy weather or postman's laggardness.
Surl husband sits silent still, ah but for how long?

as ridiculed by A. A. Milne, in the *Daily News* (4 October 1922), in an article which impressed Forster

They have almost brought it off, the War to End Peace, for which they have been striving for three years. What an incredible joke! A war 'to defend the freedom of the Straits and the sanctity of our graves in Gallipoli', says *Punch* magnificently. Of course you can think of it like that, and it sounds quite dignified and natural. But you may also think, as I do, of those five or ten or twenty men, our chosen statesmen, sitting round a table, the same old statesmen, each with his war memories thick upon him, each knowing his own utter incompetence to maintain a war or to end a war . . .

Forster, taking up Milne's title, 'Another Little War', wrote five days later

Sir, — Mr A. A. Milne's brilliant article deserves special thanks for its scathing analysis of 'the sanctity of our graves in Gallipoli'. Our rulers knew that their policy would not be popular, and in the hope of stampeding us into it they permitted this vile appeal — the vile because the sentiment that it tries to pervert is a noble one and purifies the life of a nation when directed rightly. The bodies of the young men who are buried out there have no quarrel with one another now, no part in our quarrels or interest in our patronage, no craving for holocausts of more young men. Anyone who has himself entered, however feebly, into the life of the spirit, can realize this.

It is only the elderly ghouls of Whitehall who exhume the dead for the purpose of party propaganda and employ them as a bait to catch the living.

Peace would do wrong to our undying dead, —
The sons we offered might regret they died
If we got nothing lasting in their stead
We must be solidly indemnified.

Thus wrote Wilfred Owen, a month before he was killed on the Sambre Canal. The men about whom he wrote it are still in office, still pleasantly busied in their task of finding graves for heroes. At the next election can we not provide them with a quiet retreat of their own? Its sanctity should be inviolable.

In the same vein he wrote for the *New Leader* a bitter imaginary dialogue 'Our Graves in Gallipoli',¹ in which two anonymous graves — one, so it turns out, of a British soldier and one of a Turkish — speak

¹ 20 October 1922. It was reprinted in *Abinger Harvest*

to each other about the strange interest taken once more, after seven years' silence, in 'the sanctity of our graves in Gallipoli'. The dialogue made scathing mock-Homeric play with the names of 'Lloyd George, prudent in counsels, and lion-hearted Churchill'. Churchill was the one politician whom Forster truly detested and he was jubilant when, in the November election, Churchill lost his seat

* * *

Alexandria. a History and a Guide finally appeared in the December of this year, and its fate now took an even odder turn. Soon after its publication, Forster received a regretful letter from Whitehead Morris & Co, informing him that there had been a fire in the warehouse and that the entire stock of *Alexandria* had been burnt. Fortunately, they said, it had been insured, and they enclosed a substantial cheque in compensation. A few weeks later he received another letter from the publishers. It was even more regretful. It said that, upon further search, the books had been found intact, in a cellar which had escaped the flames. This, in view of the insurance money, his publishers wrote, had created a most awkward situation, and they had taken the only way out – namely, to burn the books deliberately.¹

* * *

Mohammed's death had preoccupied his thoughts all the year, and in August he had begun a long and impassioned 'letter' or book addressed to him, meaning to record in it every moment of their friendship.

August 5th 1922

Dear Mohammed,

This book is for you and me – I wish I could distinguish more clearly between us, but it was always difficult, and now you are not here to correct me when I think of you not as you are but as I should like to think you. I write it with my mind on you and with the illusion that your mind still exists and attends. I pretend that you are still alive, because it only is thus that I can think of you as real, although I know that a putrid scrap in the Mansourah burial ground is all that was you. I write for my own comfort and to recall the past, but also because I am professionally a writer and want to pay you this last honour, although there is much that you will not understand, and some things that you will not agree with . . .

¹ There was not another edition until 1938

The letter was written in stages. He resumed in November:

Mohammed I try to keep this real, but my own words get in the way, and you are decayed to terrible things by this time – dead six months I do not mind that, but I fear you becoming unreal, so that all our talks and the occasional nights we have slept in one bed will seem to belong to other people . . . Dear boy, I want those memories to be of you, not stained by me I do not want to prate of perfect love, only to write to you as if you are real. So I try to think of your putrescence in your grave sometimes. It is real, and contemporary with me, it leads me back to the real you.

He dreamed of Mohammed most nights, and one dream expressed much self-knowledge.

I passed a young man in black with a slight but well defined moustache He was and was not Mohammed – not he outwardly but he in the intensity, the quality of the emotion caused in my heart I knew I ought to follow him but delayed – my character – and when I tried to do so my legs were weighted, I heard he was catching a train. Painfully I arrive, a bath being filled with hot water. I was in time, the train had not gone, others in the bath room left us alone, he lent against the edge of the bath, half sitting, half standing, entirely naked, his dark bush distinct, and he smiled. The effect was not physical nor was my awakening ghastly except that I awoke.¹

The dream throws light on the story that he wrote at about this time, called 'The Life to Come'.² The story began merely as one of his 'indeencies', but turned into something very different. It concerns a handsome young missionary who once sleeps with a young native chieftain, with the result that the chieftain takes their love to be that 'love of God' which is spoken of by Christians and promptly announces the conversion of his tribe. The missionary is appalled but is too prudent to give up this brilliant conversion, so he cheats his uncomprehending disciple, who wishes to enjoy more such love, with shadowy promises. Years pass, and the chieftain, broken-hearted at the postponement, and finding himself robbed not only of his religion but of his lands and royal authority, falls mortally ill. The missionary, now dried-up and middle-aged, comes to visit him on his deathbed, finding him lying alone and naked on his house-roof. He feels it safe now to venture a Christian embrace and tells the dying Vithobai of

¹ Diary, 20 December 1923.

² Published in *'The Life to Come' and Other Stories* (1972).

the joys of the life to come. 'And will there be love?' asks Vithobai. 'In the real and true sense, there will,' answers the missionary. 'The life to come,' shouts Vithobai. 'Life, life, eternal life. Wait for me in it'; and he stabs the missionary through the heart and hurls himself, victoriously, over the parapet.

The story was written, Forster said, 'in indignation'. By which, he meant, partly, indignation against British imperialism; but he was hitting, too, at some suspected over-cautiousness in himself. It was a story, eloquent but over-romantic though it is, which always meant a lot to him.

He had received Mohammed's ring, and would put it on once a day. In the spring of 1923 he went for a walk in Chertsey Meads and put it on his finger, hoping to recapture Mohammed's image but finding him grown even more unreal. 'What was so appalling on the Meads,' he noted (25 March 1923), 'was the belief that I had *better* forget my friend. this had never come to me before.' He added more words to his letter to Mohammed:

You are dead, Mohammed, and Morgan is alive and thinks more about himself and less of you every word he writes. You called out my name at Beebit el Hagar station after we had seen that ruined temple about two miles from it that no one but us seems to have seen. It was dark and I heard an Egyptian shouting who had lost his friend: Margan, Margan - you calling me and I felt we belonged to each other, you had made me an Egyptian. When I call you on the downs now, I cannot make you alive, nor can I belong to you because you own nothing. I shall not belong to you when I die - only be like you

* * *

Pharos and Pharillon came out in May 1923. It was very well received, and, as he had hoped, the section on Cavafy's poetry aroused interest, various publishers and agents writing to him to ask for more Cavafy poems. He had, meanwhile, succeeded in interesting T. S. Eliot and Arnold Toynbee in Cavafy and had placed one or two poems in the *Nation* and the *Criterion*. The problem, he found, was not so much to provoke interest in Cavafy as to galvanize Valassopoulos, the translator he most favoured, into activity. He wrote and wrote again to him, but little or nothing came. (According to Robert Liddell, Cavafy's biographer, the trouble was that Valassopoulos did not like Cavafy's erotic poems.) He also wrote frequently to Cavafy, receiving back grateful, but very stiff and impersonal, replies.

He liked to take such trouble for other authors. Serviceability always appealed to him; and efforts of this kind, it seemed to him, were one of the duties of a man of letters. Quite often, he wrote long letters out of the blue to unknown authors, when something of theirs had interested him. He wrote such a letter, full of praise and painstaking criticism, to J. R. Ackerley, about a poem of his called 'Ghosts' which had been published in the *London Mercury* in April 1922. The theme of the letter was Memory, a Proustian subject rather on Forster's mind just then.

This business of remembering a past incident. The horror, beauty, depth, emotional and mental insecurity, that is thus introduced into our lives, and that we can neither avoid or recall. I have been reading Proust who knows all about it too and like you rejects the ordinary explanation. I don't know whether you and Proust are right in your explanations. 'Out of death lead no ways' is more probably the fact. But being right is of little importance. What you have done is to drive home the strangeness of a creature who is apparently allowed neither to remember nor to forget and who sees in the stream of his daily life, piteously disordered, the recurrence of something that is beautiful and that passes as inevitably away now as it did then. The moment a memory is registered by the intellect is its last moment.

Ackerley, then totally unknown as a writer, was flattered by this attention from Forster, and the letter was the beginning of a friendship important to both.

Ackerley was then twenty-six. He had fought on the Western Front as a junior officer, had been wounded and taken prisoner, and had subsequently been interned in Switzerland. After the war he had gone to Cambridge; and he was now in London, trying to write, while living on an allowance from his father. The father, Roger Ackerley, was a director of Elder and Fyffes, the banana-importers, and the family lived in some style, in a substantial mansion on Richmond Hill. Joe was the darling of both parents.¹ They encouraged him in his writing, and regarded it with some awe – a fact which embarrassed him, for so far he had not achieved very much. He had drafted a play about his internment experience, but this was hanging fire, and he was having even less success with some Henry James-type short stories and a historical drama in verse. So far, his only publication of any size was a long poem printed in the *English Review* in 1916.

¹ See his posthumous autobiography, *My Father and Myself* (1968).

Forster and he met a few months after exchanging letters, and it amused them to find that, in a remote degree, they were family connections, for Mr Aylward, the music teacher whom Maimie Preston had married, was, by a former marriage, Joe Ackerley's great-grandfather.¹ Forster was attracted by Ackerley. He was exceedingly good-looking, in a romantically-English way: tall and golden-haired, though with something thin-lipped and pike-like about the mouth. He was charming and gay and funny,² with an extravagant comic imagination, a sympathy for the underdog, and a mania for telling the painful or awful truth 'I think people *ought* to be upset,' he would say. He quickly and ostentatiously announced that he was homosexual, and, as Forster soon gathered, led an intensely promiscuous, and very disaster-prone, love life. (In his own mind, however, it did not appear as promiscuity but as a devoted quest for the Ideal Friend.) There was no question of an affair between him and Forster, and indeed – though this was common with Forster – the friendship took some time to develop; as late as a year after their first meeting, Forster noted in his diary (14 October 1923). 'I don't quite like A. though he has intelligence and charm. I suspect him of cruelty' Meanwhile, it occurred to him that here, in Ackerley, might be the private secretary that the Maharaja of Chhatarpur³ had so long been looking for – or rather, for he knew Ackerley felt unsettled, here was a post which might suit him and give him rewarding experience. Ackerley rose to the suggestion; and a long and confused correspondence with India ensued, leading eventually, in October 1923, to Ackerley's appointment. Forster gave him much good advice, both before and after his departure, ending one letter to him in India (29 January 1924) 'As for being bored, don't mind it – more than the unpleasantness I mean: don't think you are wasting your time. You will never get hold of anything in India unless you experience Indian boredom.' Ackerley, after his arrival, sent him many long and entertaining letters,⁴ and Forster,

¹ Or as Forster put it to Ackerley 'Henrietta Synnot, as the second sister of the first husband of your great grandfather's second wife, was my first cousin once removed.'

² 'I do think he had more charm than anyone I ever knew,' said his friend Gerald Heard of him later

³ See p. 93.

⁴ Two of them may be read in *The Ackerley Letters*, ed. N. Braybrooke (1975), pp. 6-13.

in one of his replies, told him: 'Your letters were a godsend to my etiolated novel. I copied in passages and it became ripe for publication immediately'

With the death of Mohammed, Forster had felt that for the moment he wanted no new intimacy – also that, perhaps, he was incapable of attracting one. His experience at Dewas, had, he felt, left him 'both cuter and stupider' – more wary, but less capable of connection with people. Nevertheless, in this same year, he began another of the major friendships of his later life, with Sebastian Sprott.¹ Sprott, the son of a country solicitor, was by now twenty-five and was studying psychology in Cambridge, having done some war-service before going to the university. Forster had got to know him through the Apostles, and by the time that he did so, Sprott was already well known in Bloomsbury, the friend and lover of Maynard Keynes and an intimate of Lady Ottoline Morrell. Outwardly he was almost an 'exquisite': he fluttered, dressed elegantly and spoke in very Bloomsbury accents – the voice shooting up and down the scale or suddenly pouncing on some selected word. His style was, in a way, misleading, for his true wish was not for a 'gilded' Cambridge existence but for a hearty, egalitarian, sexually promiscuous low-life. A year or two later, being then a lecturer in psychology at Nottingham university, he had taken a house in a slum and had made for himself a largely working-class circle of friends, half of them regularly in and out of jail.

Sprott was a tender-hearted, loquacious and impractical young man, facing the world with a frown of pretended truculence. His comic insouciance made Forster laugh a good deal. There was never an 'affair' between them, but from the first Forster felt a kind of protectiveness towards him, regarding him as too harebrained to make a success of his career. Sprott, who was open-handed, was constantly hard up, and quite soon Forster was making him an allowance – something in the order of £100 a year. Sprott developed a great loyalty and affection towards Forster and, to amuse him, would write him long picaresque accounts of his escapades and

¹ Walter John Herbert Sprott (1897–1971). A Cambridge friend, A. T. Bartholomew, was once telling him that 'Jack Sprott' was too short and insignificant a name, when Dent came into the room carrying some music by J. S. Bach, and it was decided there and then to call him 'Sebastian'. In later years he reverted to 'Jack'.

seductions they were some of the few letters that Forster, an habitual burner of letters, never destroyed. One, belonging to the later 1920s, runs 'And now for a warning, Forster old chap, – don't you ever use a heap of chaff as a double bed. It is a long story . . .'

Forster's work on *A Passage to India* had continued steadily throughout 1923. In 1920 Masood, no doubt through Forster's arranging, had published an article on 'Some Aspects of Urdu Poetry' in the *Athenaeum*, and Forster drew on it – using some of Masood's very quotations* – when depicting Aziz and his friends and their love of flowery and melancholy verse. Forster had much trouble with the trial scenes in the novel, not being sure of his legal detail and doubting – with reason, as it turned out – whether a case as important as that of Aziz would have been tried in a subordinate court. He wrote about it to Masood, and Masood offered to check such details throughout the novel. When Forster finally sent him the typescript, however, his only reply was, unhelpfully, 'It is magnificent. Do not alter a word.'

The final pages of the novel were assisted not only by Proust and Joe Ackerley, but by T. E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. Forster had received an introduction (or rather a re-introduction¹) to Lawrence through Siegfried Sassoon. It began by Sassoon's lending him, at his own request and with Lawrence's approval, a copy of the privately-printed 'Oxford' text of *Seven Pillars*.² He had guessed instinctively that Lawrence's book would prove important to him: 'It is exactly what I want,' he told Sassoon on 12 December 1923, before he had even seen it. It proved to be so beyond expectation. The book astonished him, and supported him in a cherished belief, that sensitiveness and introspection could exist side by side

¹ He had encountered Lawrence two years earlier. George Antonius, Forster's old friend from Alexandrian days, had come to London on the Emir Feisal's staff and invited Forster to a luncheon with Feisal at a hotel in Berkeley Square. The meal took place on 22 February 1921. Feisal was absent during most of it, on business at the Colonial Office, but had returned near the end of it in the company of T. E. Lawrence, whom Forster remembered as 'a small fair-haired boy' who 'rapped out encouraging words about the Middle East'. He had been excited by this meeting and had written to Lawrence, receiving no reply. (See *T. E. Lawrence By His Friends*, ed. A. W. Lawrence (1937), p. 235.)

² During 1922 Lawrence had had eight copies printed on the presses of the *Oxford Times*

with vigour, active heroism and largeness of vision. He wrote a fervent panegyric to Sassoon on 31 December:

Fancy people still discussing whether the Nation or the Adelphi is in the right, whether the Sitwells have genius or merely talent, whether Riceyman Steps is up to the level of Clayhanger or of the Old Wives' Tale, whether De la Mare is more or less imaginative than Yeats, and all the time a book like this is being written. It moves me so deeply that I nearly cry, but my emotion is not entangled with any affection for the author – who is well able to look after himself – and so it is disinterested and so durable. I have read straight ahead as far as the meeting with Feisal, and have dipped much elsewhere: the effect is far greater when one reads straight on, and the cumulation will surely be tremendous greater for me than for you because you have not this romantic passion for the East which chance or temperament has allotted me, and which L's scenery, or characters, evoke with almost intolerable violence.

The book affected him not only as a man but as a writer. He wrote the two final chapters of *A Passage to India* under its influence, completing them, and the novel, in a burst of confident energy. With his novel finished, Forster sent Lawrence one of his admirable and painstaking letters of criticism. It ran to many pages and was by no means all adulation. It drew a distinction between the 'fluid' and the 'granular' methods in writing: Lawrence's was the granular – as opposed to Tolstoy's, which was the fluid.

I see people on camels, motionless, I look again and they are in a new position which I can connect with its predecessor, but is similarly immobile. There never can have been a Movement with so little motion in it! It all goes on, never unreal, practically every sentence and word is alive, but life unprintable in the spaces between the words is absent.

There were, he told Lawrence, certain subjects that the granular method was adapted to and others which it was not, it was suited to scenery, and also to pathos, but it did not suit men, or animals. He also found fault with what he called Lawrence's 'pseudo-reflective vein': 'I don't always see that which you are willing to reveal, but rather your hand straying towards the black heap of words.' For all this, he told Lawrence, 'You will never show it to anyone who will like it more than I do.' Lawrence was excited by this letter, writing to Forster (20 February 1924) that it had been brought to him while

he was in bed with influenza and had instantly cured him. His own letter, as often in the future, was in a tone of extravagant self-abasement: 'I feel profoundly dejected over it all. It reads to me inferior to nearly every book which I have found patience to read. . .'

At this period Lawrence was serving, under the name of T. E. Shaw, as a private in the Royal Tank Corps. It was the second of his attempts to escape his own identity – the first, when he enlisted in the R A F as 'Aircraftman Ross', having been thwarted. He disliked the army, and within a year or so, through influence in high places, he was to secure a transfer back to the R A F. Meanwhile he was stationed at Bovington, in Dorset, working in the company stores and spending his spare time in a nearby cottage that he rented, called Clouds Hill. He invited Forster to visit him there, and the visit, which took place in March, went very well; indeed, Forster told Sassoon (25 March 1924) that he 'nearly fell to pieces before Lawrence'. He found him, 'a rare remote creature, uncanny, yet attractive', with sudden and disconcerting shifts of role – one moment he was the aspiring writer, the next a 'close-lipped Oxford M.A.' or a 'dashing freebooter'. He noticed he had a bad handshake, a clammy and limp one, and, perhaps partly for this reason, he suspected him of 'practices' (By this he meant something of the Yoga kind; but it was a shrewd observation, considering what is now known about Lawrence's devices to have himself beaten.¹) As for Lawrence's present way of life, and his explanations of it, they struck Forster as preposterous. 'He is inside a membrane of absurdity which has worn so thin that it is amazing he cannot see the light,' he wrote to Sassoon (25 March 1924). 'Those damned Arabs are all right and he knows it.' They had got on to the subject of 'unpublishable' writings – Lawrence remarked that *Seven Pillars* would have been unpublishable a year or two previously – and Forster, after his return, sent him 'The Life to Come'. This caused a momentary hitch in their relations, for Lawrence's reaction to the story, so he told Forster, was to want to 'laugh and laugh'. It seemed a very odd remark to Forster, and he never forgot it.

At the end of April, Forster and his mother received news from Abinger that his Aunt Laura Forster had collapsed and was probably dying. They went down at once to West Hackhurst and found his

¹ See P. Knightley and Colin Simpson, *The Secret Lives of Lawrence of Arabia* (1969).

aunt wandering in her mind, but able to recognize them. To Forster's surprise and pleasure, she kept saying nice things about Lily; it seemed that, having for forty years resented Lily as an intruder in the family, she now wanted, on her death-bed, to make amends. She died peacefully within a fortnight, leaving instructions for all her animals to be killed after her; and on the day of her funeral her friends and relations had a gay and noisy lunch, drinking several bottles of her wine.

Her death was a significant event for Forster. His feeling for her had been more of a family one than personal: she had been too masterful, and too boring a conversationalist, for real affection. Still, she had been his benefactor all his life, and he was now to inherit West Hackhurst, the house that his father had built for her. (He half regretted the inheritance, for her love for her house had appealed to him, and he wished in a way it could be buried with her.) His inheritance was bound, he felt, to make a change in his way of life. It meant he had become one of the 'landed gentry', and the prospect repelled and intrigued him. To friends, he wrote about it ruefully. 'I have to visit my estates,' he told Carrington (27 June 1924). 'They are no pleasure, but a bitterness and dreariness.' He was not really sure if he would ever occupy the house; but meanwhile there were months of work ahead, sorting through his aunt's possessions. 'I am tearing up letters of the last 150 years, all uninteresting,' he wrote to Sassoon (17 June 1924), 'or wondering what is to be done with George Richmond heads, each more insipid than his sister.'

A Passage to India was due to appear on 4 June. It was an appropriate moment for it, for the rights and wrongs of the British *raj* were much in the news throughout May and early June, by reason of the O'Dwyer case. Sir Michael O'Dwyer, who had been in charge in the Punjab at the time of the Amritsar massacre, had brought a libel action against an Indian official, Sir Sankaran Nair, over the latter's book *Gandhi and Anarchy* (1922). The book was mainly an attack on Gandhi, but incidentally it accused O'Dwyer of 'terrorism' in wartime recruiting and of ultimate responsibility for the 1919 massacre. General Dyer, the officer who had actually ordered the shooting, was too ill to give evidence, but the judge, H. A. McCardie, took the occasion to revive the whole Dyer controversy. Forster followed the case with excitement; and as it happened, he got an inside view of proceedings, for Harold Laski, whom he knew slightly, was on the

jury. Laški was an expert on all aspects of the Amritsar affair, and the trial became a duel between him and McCardie. All through, the judge was extremely partisan in Dyer and O'Dwyer's favour, cutting many waggish jokes at the expense of Indian politics and politicians and going so far, in his summing-up, as to say that 'General Dyer, in the grave and exceptional circumstances, acted rightly, and in my opinion he was wrongly punished by the Secretary of State for India.' The jury duly found for O'Dwyer, awarding him £500 damages (some of them had wanted to give him £20,000), and they were violent against Laski, the sole dissenting juror. One of them, he told Forster, said to him 'I am sorry for your poor wife and hope she will never speak to you again.' Forster wrote to Darling (17 June 1924) in fury at the verdict.

It looks to me so sinister and so simple, but probably it is neither. Thus - Sir S. Nair, a shit, writes a book against Gandhi, which incidentally contains a sentence libelling O'D. Besides being a shit, he is a Moderate so O'D takes the opportunity of discrediting that party by bringing an action, and wrecking our last hopes of coming to terms with India - Is this correct? It is impossible to suppose O'D minded the attack personally, moreover only 3 copies of N's book ever came to this country. God, I have been enraged. A dirty political manoeuvre. There may be some other reason but I can see none.

Out of pure resentment, he sent McCardie a copy of his novel, and to his bafflement received a courteous acknowledgement from the judge, saying it had been an 'inspiration' and a 'help'.

Up to the last moment, he had been assailed by doubts and despairs about his novel, but its reception removed all his fears. The book suited the moment, and friends and reviewers alike called it a masterpiece and his finest achievement. Ralph Wright, reviewing it in the *New Statesman* said. 'We have had a long time to wait since *Howards End*, and if Mr Forster continues to write like this the waiting is worth it. *A Passage to India* is a better book than any earlier ones. It is as sensitive as they were, it is far better proportioned, and the mind which made it is more mature.' He was echoed by Rose Macaulay, writing in the *Daily News*. She said:

He has quite lost the touch of preciousness, of exaggerated care for nature and the relationships of human beings, that faintly irritate some readers of his earlier books. He used once to write at times too much as a graduate (even occasionally as an under-

graduate) of King's College, Cambridge (perhaps the most civilized place in the world), who has had an amour with Italy and another with the god Pan. In *A Passage to India* (as, indeed, in *Howards End*), Pan is only implicit, the mysticism is more diffused, the imagination at once richer, less fantastic, and more restrained. It is a novel that from most novelists would be an amazing piece of work. Coming from Mr. Forster, it is not amazing, but it is, I think, the best and most interesting book he has written.

The allusion to 'King's' values chimed with Forster's own thoughts. He wrote to Darling (15 September 1924):

I have wondered – not whether I was getting down or up, which is too difficult, but whether I had moved at all since King's. King's stands for personal relationships, and these still seem to me the most real things on the surface of the earth, but I have acquired a feeling that people must go away from each other (spiritually) every now and then, and improve themselves if the relationship is to develop or even endure. *A Passage to India* describes such a going away – preparatory to the next advance, which I am not capable of describing. It seems to me that individuals progress alternately by loneliness and intimacy, and that legend of the multiplied Krishna (which I got, like so much that is precious to me, by intercourse with Bapu Sahib¹) serves as a symbol of a state where the two might be combined. The 'King's' view over-simplified people: that I think was its defect. We are more complicated, also richer, than it knew, and affection grows more difficult than it used to be, and also more glorious.

He had sent a copy to D. H. Lawrence, in New Mexico, and it was this theme of 'going away from each other' that most struck Lawrence. He wrote (23 July 1924):

... I don't care about Bou-oum – Nor all the universe. Only the dark ahead & the silence into which we haven't yet spoken our impertinent echoes. – You saying human relationships don't matter, then after all hingeing your book on a very unsatisfactory friendship between two men! *Caristo!* – After one's primary relation to the X – I don't know what to call it, but not god or the universe – only human relations matter.

Various readers and reviewers, Dickinson among them, objected to the mystery of the Caves scene, but, for the moment at least,² he had his answer ready. He wrote to Dickinson: (26 June 1924):

¹ i.e. the Maharaja of Dewas.

² In later years he somewhat revised his opinion. Writing to William Plomer in 1934, he told him that what was wrong with Plomer's latest novel was the

In the cave it is *either* a man, or the supernatural, *or* an illusion
 And even if I know! My writing mind therefore is a'blur here –
 i.e. I will it to remain a blur, and to be uncertain, as I am of many
 facts in daily life This isn't a philosophy of aesthetics It's a
 particular trick I felt justified in trying because my theme was
 India It sprang straight from my subject matter I wouldn't have
 attempted it in other countries, which though they contain
 mysteries or muddles, manage to draw rings round them

Not to his surprise, different readers took every possible different
 view as to the fairness of his treatment of Indian problems. Some
 Tory-minded readers were incensed at the book Bob and Bessie
 Trevelyan showed Forster a copy with annotations by their neighbour,
 Major Lugard,¹ saying 'Horrid!' 'The man's a bounder,' and so on,
 and Rupert Smith wrote him a violent letter, more or less breaking
 off their friendship.² A rumour also reached Forster that the book
 was thought 'highly dangerous' in certain official circles. Indian
 students took quite the opposite viewpoint they complained of the
 slighting portrait of Indians and of his making Aziz a 'libertine'.
 Marmaduke Pickthall³ thought his Indians unreal but said his
 Anglo-Indians were all too lifelike; but there were those, too, who
 thought just the opposite. Then, there were readers like Edmund
 Candler and Edward Carpenter who thought him scrupulously fair
 to both sides, and Sir Horace Plunkett⁴ even said that the book would
 save India for the empire Beatrice Webb wrote to him that the novel
 'entirely expresses our own view of the situation'.

He had thought much about 'fairness' himself and had come to the
 conclusion, or so he told himself, that he was bored with it He wrote
 to his old friend E. V. Thompson⁵ (22 June 1924).

thing he found wrong in *A Passage to India*. 'I tried to show that India is an
 unexplainable muddle by introducing an unexplained muddle – Miss Quested's
 experience in the cave When asked what happened there, I *don't know*
 And you, expecting to show the untidiness of London, have left your book
 untidy. – Some fallacy, not a serious one, has seduced us both, some confusion
 between the dish and the dinner.'

¹ A relative of the famous Lord Lugard, Governor of Nigeria

² The two did not renew their friendship for thirty years

³ Marmaduke Pickthall (1875–1936), author of novels on oriental themes
 admired by Forster.

⁴ Sir Horace Curzon Plunkett (1854–1932), founder of the Irish co-operative
 movement. He was a friend and neighbour of Forster's in Weybridge

⁵ See Vol. 1, p. 138.

It is a very fair-minded book. Now I am a bit worried at this, for my deepest feeling is that you are all the most awful shits at the Club, and are to blame for the muddle; but so well have I damped this down that the Northcliffe Press and officials purr.

I like being with Indians. It isn't broad mindedness but an ideosyncrasy [*sic*]. Over the Anglo Indians I have to stretch and bust myself blue. I loathe them and should have been more honest to say so. Honesty and fairness are so different. Isn't it a pity.

He returned to the theme in a letter (26 June 1924) to Dickinson, who was a specialist in seeing both sides to questions:

Isn't 'fair-mindedness' dreary! A rare achievement, and a valuable one, you will tell me, but how sterile in one's own soul. I fall in love with Orientals, with Anglo-Indians – no, that is roughly my internal condition, and all the time I had to repress the consequences, or fail to hold the scales. Where is truth? It makes me so sad that I could not give the beloved a better show. One's deepest emotions count for so little as soon as one tries to describe external life honestly, or even readably. Scarcely anyone has seen that I hoped Aziz would be charming.

The two criticisms that impressed him most were, in fact, attacks, severe but well-informed ones, by Anglo-Indian experts. The first came from H. H. Shipley, a retired Indian 'civilian' of thirty years' experience. 'You will, I trust, forgive me,' he wrote, 'for saying that you have treated the English officials very unfairly. Not one among them is even a decent fellow.'

Frankly, your Collector is impossible. There is not a Collector in India – not an English Collector – who would behave as he does. No Collector in his senses would go to the railway station to witness the arrest of a Native Asst. Surgeon. Nor would he discuss a case 'pendente lite' publicly at the Club. Nor (incidentally) do Collectors clap their hands at such meetings to enforce silence or attract attention. The arrest was absolutely illegal. A warrant is indispensable except in certain cases where the offender is taken 'flagrante delicto'. Even assuming its legality, no Superintendent would be such a fool as to carry it out so publicly; he would go quietly to the man's house. Superintendents don't ask for trouble like that! The meeting at the Club is impossible, too. Clubs are not used for such purposes in India. If a Collector behaved as Turton did he would be written down as a madman. And pardon me if I say that the idea of the members rising to their feet at Heaslop's entrance made me roar with laughter. In our Indian Clubs a member is a member, not a God, whether he be Collector or

Merchant's Assistant. We are not such bum-suckers as that, if you will excuse the expression.

There was much more on the same lines, and Forster replied with asperity 'Even if my technical errors over the arrest and trial were corrected, even if the alleged social solecisms (though these of course are more disputable) were altered to your liking, you would still dislike the book as a whole because of its reading of English psychology. The reading according to my lights is true, and I am not disposed to modify it, nor does anything in your letter, either explicit or implicit, dispose me to modify it.' Shipley replied civilly and at length, making a further defence of the British in India, and concluding

It is a feature of the stay-at-home Englishman that he is intensely suspicious of his countrymen who are engaged in the administration of the dark races. Possibly it comes from an uneasy fear of what he himself might do in circumstances, possibly from a too rigid belief in the saying that onlookers see most of the game, forgetting that 'coelum non animus mutant' etc I have often puzzled over it & am no nearer a solution . . . That is another reason why I think it deplorable that a man should consider himself well-equipped for writing about India after a superficial study of its conditions

Forster thanked him for his more friendly tone and answered:

. . . As to what qualifies a man to write a novel dealing with India, to what extent blue-book accuracy is desirable, to what extent intensity of impression and sensitiveness, is a controversial question, and one on which gibes are apt to be exchanged. I have only been to the country twice (year & a half in all), and only been acquainted with Indians for eighteen years, yet I believe that I have seen certain important truths that have been hidden from you despite your thirty years service on the spot, and despite your highly specialized training. 'Padgett M.P.'¹ you will retort We must leave it at that But several times in your letters when you lay down that certain things can't happen I am reminded from experiences that they can: and when you select for special censure the atmosphere of 'boorishness' in my court scene, I think of the precisely similar atmosphere that appears to have prevailed in the O'Dwyer libel trial, which occurred after my book had gone to press

¹ Character in Kipling's story of that name; type of the opinionated and ignorant visitor to India.

The second attack came in a long letter from E. A. Horne, published in the *New Statesman* for 16 August 1924. Horne, whom Forster knew a little, had served in the Indian education service and was author of *The Political System of British India* (1922). His letter began with praise, especially of the portraits of Indians in the novel. It was, said Horne, when one turned to Forster's Anglo-Indians that one was 'confronted by the strangest sense of unreality'.

Where have they come from? What planet do they inhabit? One rubs one's eyes. They are not even good caricatures, for an artist must see his original clearly before he can successfully caricature it . . .

Even about the general background, however, there is a slight air of unreality. This is partly because the picture is out of date. The period is obviously before the war. Not that this matters, provided it is clearly understood. It is not only that Lieutenant-Governors and dog-carts are out of date. All the fuss about the 'bridge' party will strike the Anglo-Indian reader as hopelessly out of date, it being nowadays very much the fashion – not in Delhi and Simla only, but in the humble mofussil [rural] station also – to entertain and cultivate Indians of good social standing.

But it is of Mr Forster's Anglo-Indian men and women that I wish to speak. Of Turton, the Collector, who is addressed individually and in chorus, and at every turn – as by children in school – as 'Burra Sahib'; and about whom all the other Europeans scrape and cringe. Turton, who is for ever hectoring Fielding, a man not much his junior in years and occupying a sufficiently important official position, telling him (speaking 'officially', whatever that may mean) to stand up, or 'to leave this room at once', or to be at the club at six, always addressing him as 'Mr' Fielding. 'Pray, Mr Fielding, what induced you to speak to me in such a tone?' This man is not an Indian civilian, he is a college don, and ridiculous enough at that . . . And what is one to make of the women? But I think they are scarcely worth discussing, so inhuman are they without exception. And if these people are preposterous, equally preposterous are the scenes which they enact . . .

And why is this? Why are these people and these incidents so wildly improbable and unreal? The explanation is a singular but a simple one. Mr Forster went out to India to see, and to study, and to make friends of Indians. He did not go out to India to see Anglo-Indians; and most of what he knows about them, their ways and their catchwords, and has put into his book, he has picked up from the stale gossip of Indians, just as the average Englishman who goes out to India picks up most of what he

knows about Indians from other Englishmen. It is a curious revenge that the Indian enjoys in the pages of Mr Forster's novel which profess to deal with Anglo-Indian life and manners, and some would say a just one. All the same we venture to suggest to him, next time he goes to India 'Try seeing Anglo-Indians'

He added that there was yet another reason why Forster's picture was distorted, a reason symbolized by the fact that Fielding can forgive Aziz for bitter offences but has no forgiveness for the European club. 'I have said that Fielding is Mr Forster's mouthpiece, and nobody can describe people as they really are unless he has some affection for them.'

Forster wrote him, in private, an amicable answer (19 August 1924):

. Your letter has interested me more than any printed criticism I have read. I have gone through it several times and am very grateful to you. Like it all? - no! but I am held from first to last, and do appreciate your consideration - in all senses of that word.

Let's take the praise as read - read with delight and pride - and come to the last four paragraphs. The novel is full of mistakes in fact - naturally, for I've only been twice to India, and neither you nor I will lay stress on them. There is no reason I should not correct or omit the various details you criticise - e.g. I have already been told about 'Burra Sahib' and have cut it out in the next edition, and I could make it clear that Turton habitually said 'Fielding' and only stuck on 'Mr' when he was in a temper, and I could make Mrs McBryde's children have measles and call her to the Hills suddenly, thus decreasing the enormity of her husband's conduct. But even if I made these and similar changes, you still wouldn't feel the Anglo-Indian picture fair. The facts might be right, but the accent would remain, and how on earth is one to do away with one's accent? I tried, but knew I'd failed. . . you have hit the nail on the head. I don't like Anglo-Indians as a class. I tried to suppress this and be fair to them, but my lack of sympathy came through.

You say I don't like them because I don't really know them. But how can I ever like them when I happen to like the Indians and they don't? They don't (this part of my picture you do not challenge) - so what am I to do? Sympathy is finite - at least mine is, alas, - so that as the rope is pulled into the right hand it slips out of the left. If I saw more of Anglo-India at work (or shared its work, which is the only sympathetic seeing) I should of course realize its difficulties and loyalties better and write about it from within. Well and good, but you forget the price to be paid. I

should begin to write about Indians from without. My statements about them might be the same, but the accent would have altered

That is why I feel your letter so fair and so unfair at the same time. You say that I am always prejudiced and frequently preposterous – quite right, I am (if by prejudice you mean honest prejudice, blindness temporary or congenital, and I think you do). But you haven't seen that this lack of balance is inherent in the Indian tangle, and that if I got the Club sympathetically true, Aziz's shanty would ring false and no longer move you. Perhaps we shall get the perfect, the unaccented book some day, and all my theory of an Indian tangle prove mere Cambridge. Perhaps the book will come – from you.

There were further letters in the *New Statesman*, but he did not make any public reply. He was not seriously troubled by the criticisms, though he cursed Masood for the errors of Indian detail. Essentially, he was at last at ease about the novel and no longer acutely sensitive to praise or blame, moreover, it was selling extremely well – especially in America, where sales reached 30,000 within the first month. With his coming royalties and his inheritance from Aunt Laura he felt himself, for the first time in his life, to be becoming prosperous, and his thoughts turned, as usual with him, to sharing his good fortune. Over the next year or two he was to make many large gifts of money to his relatives, and to friends like Forrest Reid, Frank Vicary and the Bargers.

He was enjoying his success and fame, but, as in earlier years, they disturbed him too, and he did not quite know what to do with them. 'Have pains in my heart, so that I may not be able to carry vegetables home to Weybridge,' he noted in his diary (31 August 1924). 'Too much good luck, and too late. I cannot live up to it.'

6 A Section House in Hammersmith

Underlying his various reflections about the success of *A Passage to India* was the most important of all: that he would never write another novel. This was an instinct and prognostication rather than a vow or decision: however, it proved correct, and we must search for the explanation. One thing is plain, we have to go back in time at least to *Howards End*, for it was after the publication of *Howards End* that his difficulties as a writer began. I suggested in my pages on 'The Year of *Howards End*' (Vol. I, Chapter 11) that he was of the type defined by Freud as 'Those wrecked by success'. that he was one of those who, on realizing their dearest wishes, are afflicted and inhibited by superstitious fears – the fears in his case taking the form of a conviction of sterility. One must not build too much on this theory: for one thing, 'wrecked' is too dramatic a word for what happened to him. Nevertheless it could be one part of the explanation. Forster, though a rationalist, was certainly by temperament a superstitious man: one who, having been especially and royally favoured as a child, had magical feelings about his own life. The plots of his novels, where they involve children, have, from one point of view, the air of being miraculous 'nativity-stories' about himself: how such a favoured child came to be born (*Howards End*), or how, with a little less good fortune, he might have been deprived of life (*Where Angels Fear to Tread*). Similarly, the excess of sudden deaths in those early novels, which are otherwise so joyful in tone, suggests some kind of superstitious propitiation. We can easily imagine such a man experiencing irrational fears at the realization of very deep wishes. And indeed there is evidence that he did so. A year or two after the period we have now reached, he experienced spectacular success and

acclaim with his lectures on 'Aspects of the Novel',¹ and again he found it half-painful. He told T. E. Lawrence. 'A sort of nervousness – glancing at my stomach for beginnings of cancer – seems to gather in me.' He asked Lawrence, at this time, what he thought of the story of Polycrates and his ring.² The story runs that Polycrates, tyrant of Samos, was so invariably successful in all his enterprises, that his friend the king of Egypt, fearing so much good fortune for him, told him he should sacrifice something of value to himself. Accordingly he threw a precious ring into the sea, but a few days later, a fish was brought to him at table and the ring was found in its stomach. At this, his friend abandoned him, as being clearly doomed by the gods. Forster told Lawrence he regarded it as an allegory, 'and more helpful than most'.³

He himself sometimes gave a much more practical reason for giving up novel-writing: namely, that, being a homosexual, he grew bored with writing about marriage and the relations of men and women. This must have been an important part of the truth; and one can add to it the various frustrations attaching to *Maurice* – to have written a novel that could not be published (for it is certainly true that in 1914 it could not have been⁴); to know at the back of his mind that it might have been a better novel if it had been written for publication; to find that, having written it, he was, after all, no nearer to writing a publishable novel; and finally, to reflect, as he must have done then, that he had written about homosexual love-affairs as a substitute for having one. There is no need to look further for the 'cramp' that D. H. Lawrence diagnosed in him in 1915, and this 'cramp' must have some bearing on our problem.

But there is a third consideration, more general than either, and that is that Forster was one of those who have 'only one novel to write'. I don't mean this in the vulgar sense that he repeated himself: I mean that he received his whole inspiration – a vision, a kind of plot, a message – all at once, in early manhood. He became an artist because of that early experience, an experience of salvation, and his inspiration as a novelist always harked back to that moment of enlightenment. For this reason he was content to use and re-use

¹ See p. 143.

² It is related by Herodotus *History*, Book 3, Chapter 40.

³ Letter to T. E. Lawrence, 18 March 1927.

⁴ It was not published till after his death, in 1971.

many of the same plot-materials: for instance the jaded traveller unable (for what reason he cannot tell) to respond to the scenes he or she has come to visit, or the picnic or party of pleasure invaded by panic forces. (Mrs Moore in *A Passage to India* is, again, clearly a reworking and elaboration of Mrs Wilcox in *Howards End*) For the same reason, the social types and manners which ruled his imagination were those of his Edwardian youth. This was no small difficulty for a realistic novelist, though it would not have arisen for a poet. He already found it so with *A Passage to India*, and evidently it was bound to grow with every year or decade.

It seems likely that all these factors were present in his mind in the year that we have reached. At any rate, though in the years that were to follow his thoughts did sometimes turn towards a new novel, they did so surprisingly rarely, and the most that ever took shape was a brief synopsis. The knowledge of his situation did not make him so anxious as it had done in earlier days, though sometimes he would lament that he 'felt like a dummy, from whom real life has been withdrawn'.¹ Creation had always represented for him the supreme pleasure, but he refused to regard it as his sole *raison d'être* in life, he told himself he had other resources and must make do with them

* * *

The immediate problem facing him was what to do about West Hackhurst. For one thing, only thirteen years of the lease were left to run. Moreover, the prospect of moving filled his mother with gloom and despair. For her it symbolized her supersession, since it would be his house, not hers; moreover, or so Forster guessed, she pictured it as her 'last home', a token of her coming death. She suggested at first that they should occupy both houses, then that she should 'retire' to Weybridge, leaving him in sole charge of West Hackhurst. They vacillated all summer, before making up their minds to the move and to the selling of Harnham.

He had, meanwhile, begun an adventure, though one that seemed unlikely to prosper. He had casually got into conversation with the driver of a Weybridge bus. The young man had attracted him, reminding him vaguely of Mohammed – partly, no doubt, because of his occupation; also he was rather amusing in a Cockney-humour vein.

¹ Letter to G. H. Ludolf, 11 July 1926.

After one or two more encounters, the driver, who was called Arthur B—, surprised Forster by inviting him home, 'to have a crack'. It turned out he had a wife and child, but Forster enjoyed his evening with them, and, since Arthur seemed eager for friendship, he invited him back to Harnham, explaining to his mother that he was giving him French lessons. Lily told Forster that B— had mistaken his class and would be intimidated when he saw their house, however B—, when he came, surveyed their hall and its carpet without emotion. ('Perhaps I don't look like a gentleman, or the house like property,' Forster told Ackerley.) After the first visit, B— gave Forster his photograph, and this provoked another sharp remark from Lily: 'How like the lower classes to give you his photograph at a first call. They always think one in love with them after the slightest civility.'

Forster began to build hopes on this new acquaintance and arranged further French lessons, planning them for when his mother would be away in Abinger. He told Florence that he had better pursue the affair, if 'affair' it should prove, while he was able to, since it would not suit with the 'pseudo-feudalism' of Abinger. However, B— now began to break appointments, and eventually Forster realized that his wife Madge was interfering. He resigned himself to failure, telling Joe 'It is not my policy, even were it within my power, to break up homes.' It left him a little cast down, and with the thought that, with all his success, he was missing the thing he most desired and was not likely to achieve it. In his New Year's summing-up he addressed himself and his appearance with discomfiture:

Jan 2. Famous, wealthy, miserable, physically ugly - red nose enormous, round patch in middle of scalp which I forget less than I did and which is brown when I don't wash my head and pink when I do. Face in the distance - mirrors of Reform Club¹ - is toad-like and pallid, with a tiny rim of hair along the top of the triangle. My stoop must be appalling yet I don't think much of it, indeed I still don't think often. *Now* I do, and am surprised I don't repel more generally: I can still get to know any one I want and have that illusion that I am charming and beautiful. Take no bother over nails or teeth but would powder my nose if I wasn't found out. Stomach increases, but not yet visible under waistcoat.

¹ He had joined the Reform Club in 1922, being sponsored by Siegfried Sassoon.

The anus is clotted with hairs, and there is a great loss of sexual power – it was very violent 1921–22. Eyes & probably hearing weaker

Lily was particularly trying, just at this time. The New Year was always a bad period with her, and the move had exacerbated matters. She would be peevish, and then he would hear her sobbing. Once, hearing her, he took some pennies out of his pocket and hurled them all over the floor, noting 'This is the 8th or 9th time I have lost control in the last 3 months I am not afraid of madness for it's a gesture not a mood but I am afraid of doing something extensive.'¹ What he actually did was to decide to find himself some rooms in London. It was an obvious solution, and one which he could well afford, and he began the search at once Bloomsbury seemed the obvious choice as an area; and with Vanessa Bell's help he succeeded in finding a flat at 27 Brunswick Square, in the house of Mrs M. A. Marshall, widow of an architect and a friend of many of the 'Bloomsbury' circle.² Lily took the development surprisingly coolly, and very soon the pattern was established that he should sleep a night or two every week in London. (Even on these weekly visits, he would keep in touch with her by postcards)

* * *

Joe Ackerley had by now returned from India. He greatly approved of Forster's move towards London, and the two began to see a good deal of each other, falling into the habit of discussing all their doings. Ackerley even wanted to live with Forster, but Forster did not wish this. For the time being Ackerley had returned to his parents' home in Richmond, but he felt restless there, and guilty at his parents' indulgence towards him as a 'writer'. His mother would tap timidly at his 'sacred' door, fearing to interrupt, and he would snap at her, knowing there was nothing to interrupt

He had a variety of friends among writers and actors, and Forster and he would often meet them at lunch at a favourite Soho restaurant (for some time, it was Chez Victor in Wardour Street). Forster thus

¹ Diary, 2 January 1925. – 'Poor dear, how she figures!' he wrote a year or so later, on re-reading this entry. 'In my memory she does not cause me all that pain.'

² She was the mother of Ray Marshall, who married David Garnett, and of Frances Marshall, who married Ralph Partridge.

acquired a new circle. He began to see a good deal, for instance, of Leo Charlton.¹ Charlton was a First World War general, now an Air Commodore, and had recently resigned as Chief of Air Staff in Iraq, in protest against the bombing of defenceless tribesmen. He came from an old Northumbrian Catholic family and, in manner, was very much the old-style army officer: tall, large-nosed, dictatorial, with a flat tweed cap pulled well down over his eyes in guardsman fashion. He wrote boys' books (later becoming the *New Statesman's* air correspondent) and lived with a young ex-aircraftman boyfriend named Tom Wichelo² – carrying this fact off among his fellow-officers with great insouciance, though saying 'One is always dreading the sound of parental hooves up the garden path.' Another of their friends was Gerald Heard,³ just then making his name as a scientific journalist. He was reputed to read two thousand books a year and had an extraordinary flow of information about hygiene, sex, paranormal phenomena and the probable destiny of mankind. He was a dress-fetishist, favouring purple suède shoes and leather jackets with leopard-skin collars, and he had his eyelids painted with what looked like mascara (actually a specific against conjunctivitis). Strangers thought of him, nervously, as a sort of Wellsian supermind or 'man of the future'. These and other friends represented for Forster a new aspect of London life – as it were the higher Bohemia. He enjoyed great prestige and affection among them, though he was felt not in all respects to belong. Leo Charlton once said, 'Have you noticed how Morgan's friends always drop their voices when they talk of him, as if he were Jesus Christ?'

Joe Ackerley himself was living a more and more busy and confused love-life. As one of his friends described it, he would encounter a foreign waiter at lunch at the Café Royal, take him home in the afternoon, give him a gold trinket as a seal of undying friendship, quarrel with him irrevocably, and return him, with tragic dignity, to the Café Royal in time for dinner. Forster was amused, for Joe made an excellent comedy of it all; then he became disquieted. Before long he was noting, 'Joe I am worried by, for I and his other friends are

¹ L. E. O. Charlton (1879–1958), author of *Charlton* (1931), *More Charlton* (1940).

² No relation of Forster's own family.

³ Henry FitzGerald Heard (1889–1971) author of *The Ascent of Humanity* (1929), *Pain, Sex and Time* (1939) etc.

inclined to be critical of him, having first encouraged him to be what he is.' When Dickinson, to whom he had introduced Ackerley, showed signs of falling in love, Forster warned him against it, telling him that Ackerley was scared of response: 'It accounts for his having had less than what seems obvious in the way of happiness' He made the same remark to Ackerley himself on one occasion,¹

I think you are scared or bored by response. Here my lecture ends, for how you are to alter yourself I know not, but sometimes the comment of an outsider helps so I make it I think love is beautiful and important – anyhow I have found it so in spite of all the pain – and it will sadden me if you fail in this particular way

Ackerley did not resent such homilies, indeed he had quickly developed a strong devotion to Forster. Forster was the father-figure he wanted: a man he could revere, who was solid and gave wise and objective advice – not that he took it – and yet with whom he could be frank and easy, as he could not with his own father. He began to take over Forster's attitudes, so much so that for a time, so his friends said, he became almost Forster's puppet. In return he, like Sprott, perceived a service he might render Forster, by modernizing his still-Edwardian ideas about the homosexual life. Forster was very ready to learn, and this too became a bond between them.

Ackerley was Forster's confidant when, unexpectedly, his acquaintance with Arthur B— turned into an affair. It happened during the move to West Hackhurst, and Forster, on his return-visits to Weybridge, enjoyed several cheerful and successful assignations with Arthur in the half-empty rooms of Harnham. It was 'a queer ending to my 20 years' sojourn in this suburb', he told Joe. He did not quite like deceiving his mother in this particular way, nor could he decide if he were doing something foolish or was 'a wise man trying to do a difficult thing'. Hitherto he had looked for 'love' in any affair, and here it did not arise. Arthur was affectionate and made Forster laugh, and that was as far as matters went, emotionally. Forster generalized to himself:² 'Coarseness and tenderness have kissed one another, but imaginative passion, love, doesn't exist with the lower classes. Lust & goodwill – is any thing more wanted?' Arthur told Forster it was the first time he had made love with a man. However, Forster did not

¹ Letter quoted by Ackerley in *My Father and Myself* (1968), p. 131.

² Diary, 24 March 1925.

place much faith in that, for he had perceived that, in a harmless way, Arthur was a compulsive liar. There was even doubt about his name: first it was 'Arthur', then it was 'Sid', now it seemed to be 'Ted'. He took 'Ted' to Wembley and found him very good company. 'It's been a vernal bruise all day,' said Ted, and, seeing a van being loaded with parcels: 'Look at the Owards End being lifted in packages for export'

* * *

In his writing life, since *A Passage to India*, Forster had been occupied with various small tasks. He was doing some reviewing for the *Nation and Athenaeum* and the *New Leader* and had completed an edition of the travel letters of Eliza Fay for the Hogarth Press. He was also busy over Cavafy, having at last received from Valassopoulos some fifty or so further translations, which he was reworking. Since the successful completion of *A Passage to India* he had resumed his indecent story-writing – occasionally lamenting the burning of earlier stories – and had found an audience for them with Lytton Strachey and 'Carrington',¹ to whom he would read them when he stayed at Ham Spray.

A French translation of *A Passage to India* was in hand, by a young writer named Charles Mauron, living in Tarascon. He and his wife Marie were Roger Fry's discovery. He had trained as a scientist, but, being threatened with blindness, had had to give up a career in the government service and had turned to literary criticism and translation – being encouraged by Roger Fry, who urged his claims as a translator in Bloomsbury and helped with the Forster translation himself. Forster and Mauron had corresponded, and it was arranged that Forster should go and stay with him in April, to work over the translation with him. In prospect, the visit made him nervous, for he had gathered that Mauron was 'shatteringly' intellectual. However, it turned out extremely happily. Mauron proved gentle and disarming, though certainly very high-mindedly literary and philosophical (he was constructing a theory called *psycho-critique*, later expounded in books on Mallarmé and Nerval). He and his wife Marie were both provincials, Charles's father being a peasant farmer who wrote poems in Provençal and had been mayor of St Rémy. The two

¹ The painter Dora Partridge, née Carrington (1893–1932). She and her husband Ralph Partridge lived with Strachey, in a complex *ménage à trois*, at Ham Spray House in Berkshire.

[1925]

A Section House in Hammersmith

were very poor, cheerful and energetic – Marie worked as the village postmistress and wrote romantic novels. Altogether, Forster told Ackerley (16 May 1925), they were a great find. ‘They have no furniture, and the most exquisite food which Madame cooks and serves with gestures of despair.’ Charles was in difficulties with his publishers, who were critical of his translation and demanded extensive changes. Forster, suspecting Parisian snobbery towards provincials, encouraged Mauron not to yield and promised to take the line that, if Mauron’s translation were not accepted, he would rather the novel was not published in France at all.

* * *

Joe Ackerley’s literary career at last took a turn for the better. His play *Prisoners of War*, now six years old, was accepted for production at the Court Theatre by a group called the ‘Three Hundred Club’. It had its *première* on 5 July 1925 and received very warm reviews – from *The Times* especially. Their reviewer said:

The facts are dark, it may be, but the treatment is full of light – the light of which no audience can fail to be continuously aware when a man, who is deeply and sincerely moved by his subject, writes with a superb naturalness and a real control of the stage . . .

Forster was impressed too, and told Ackerley he thought the play was moving and ‘big’.

This original staging of the play was only a club production, but Nigel Playfair interested himself in it, and in late August he gave it a commercial production at the Playhouse in Hammersmith, with quite a distinguished cast. It so happened that at about this time Ackerley had taken a flat in Hammersmith (6 Hammersmith Terrace, one of a row of pretty Georgian houses overlooking the river). One morning, going to collect his milk, he got into conversation with a young policeman; by chance he mentioned his name, and, to his surprise, the policeman asked if he was the author of *Prisoners of War*. It was a flattering and somehow delightful occurrence, and on the strength of it the two became friends. The policeman was named Harry Daley, and he is the key to much that follows in the present chapter.¹

Daley was the son of a Lowestoft fisherman. His father had been

¹ I got to know him in 1968 and had many talks with him before his death three years later.

drowned when he was still a boy, and during the 1914-18 war the family had moved to Dorking in Surrey, where Harry, on leaving school, had become a grocer's roundsman.¹ He was now twenty-four, having joined the police the previous year. He was plump, curly-headed, genial and rather cocky in manner: very intelligent, with a taste for music and opera, and a brilliant *raconteur*.

He was homosexual and made no secret of it; indeed he was wildly indiscreet. His closest friends, and lovers, were mainly criminals: cat-burglars, gang-leaders and the like. The police knew this very well and not only did not object but encouraged it, the sergeant in charge of his Section House allowing his friends to use the police gymnasium. Daley rarely made an arrest and took pride in this fact, but, being a keen photographer, he would sometimes stage the 'arrest' of one of his criminal friends in the station-yard – his victim peering pathetically through the bars of the Black Maria or held by Harry in a masterful grip.

Joe Ackerley and he, though never lovers, soon became intimate. It was Ackerley's *entrée* to Hammersmith and its working-class life, as it was Daley's *entrée* to literary and artistic society, and their respective friends would mingle at 6 Hammersmith Terrace. Ackerley's own circle was by now quite extensive, and Daley by this means became friendly with various writers and artists – among them Forster, Raymond Mortimer, Duncan Grant and Gerald Heard. The police, as always, were hospitable to Daley's friends, and he would throw breakfast or supper-parties for them at the Section House, cooking them bacon and eggs and then taking them off to an opera or a boxing-match. It was a life of some stresses for him, for, the next day he might find himself the policeman on duty at some fashionable Mayfair party and meet the same friends, exchanging embarrassed winks with them. It made him extremely touchy and prone to imagine slights, and his life was littered with quarrels and reconciliations.

The friendship altered Ackerley's way of life and outlook. Half of Daley's friends were unemployed, and Ackerley would befriend them, helping them with money in ingenious and delicate ways, and – with philanthropic friends like Gerald Heard – concerting schemes for

¹ He had often called for orders at West Hackhurst, during Laura Forster's lifetime.

finding them work ¹ He got his father interested in a friend of Daley's, called Fred J—, and his father was about to give him a job, when it came to his ears that Fred had been a striker, and at this he would have no more to do with him. Ackerley told Daley the news with bitterness, saying – about his father – 'You see, Harry, he's a different sort of person from you and me' Through his new way of life he was acquiring social conscience, and he adopted left-wing attitudes and style. Previously he had been rather a dandy, but he now took to corduroys, and, in his flat, adopted the austere Section-House style – bare scrubbed tables and milk served straight from the bottle

Fred J— had a sailor brother, Albert, who was away at sea when Ackerley and Daley first met but was due home in six months. It seemed fated that Ackerley, who had become popular with the whole family, should fall in love with this brother, and so it turned out. He had little difficulty in winning Albert, when he returned to England, and – for one of the few times in his career – he now began a serious relationship. Albert was an excellent character – charming and modest, as well as extremely good-looking. He was also a naval boxing champion and a reckless gambler, but Joe persuaded himself that he was a helpless boy who needed protecting from the world.

Forster, as Ackerley's close companion, often met Harry Daley and became friendly with him. He would take him to plays and concerts, and, since Daley was independent about money, he would also – though it worried him – sometimes go at Harry's expense. The friendship developed, and eventually it became an affair. Forster's letter to Daley (18 July 1926), after they had first gone to bed together harped concernedly on the money issue:

After leaving you and having some food, I found myself too excited to do anything but walk about – it is the happiest day I have spent for a very long time. But as regards the theatre, this is what I wouldn't say at the time, because it would have spoiled things – It is this: – Those tickets cost 4/9 each I believe – well you mustn't ever spend so much on me again. Make 2/6 the limit, either for a theatre or a meal. Will you agree? Isn't this common sense – given your present salary? And is anything in it contrary to friendship? I don't think so.

¹ Heard found that hotel and domestic service were less affected by the depression than other occupations, and he and his friends would pay the fees to send unemployed acquaintances to the Westminster School of Catering. It became the fashion to lunch at the restaurant attached to the school and eat food cooked by one's *protégés*.

Forster was attentive to Daley. He would write him innumerable little notes and, having got to know his duty-hours, would always be proposing brief meetings, or a stroll or a meal or a visit to a play. Sometimes he would walk with Daley along his beat, and Daley would introduce him to his costermonger and burglar friends. He was alarmed by Arthur G—, the leader of the 'coffee-house gang', though he told Daley he could understand Daley's liking him, but he approved of Fred J— 'He spoke my language,' he told Daley. It was all an education to him in working-class life. In one slum café he was intrigued by a notice saying 'Nothing but the Best Margarine Served in this Restaurant'. 'What on earth can they have been accused of serving?' he asked, wonderingly. He found it hard to relinquish philanthropic worries about money. Once, they had a meal in a café run by Italian friends of Daley's. The proprietor wanted to treat them, but Forster insisted vehemently on paying, and this riled Daley, who said: 'Next time you take me to tea with your friends, I shall insist on paying.' They could never get this money issue right. Once Daley borrowed a pound from him, repaying it next pay-day, and then a month or two later asked for another, which Forster sent, but this time with a letter of conditions. Harry must not fritter his money away, he must not buy Forster expensive meals, etc. Daley returned the pound with a rude letter, saying he could easily borrow it elsewhere, but as it turned out, he was unable to — whereupon Forster, characteristically, sent it back again without conditions.

Daley made it a principle of life to say what came into his mind. Forster would tell him he was frightened what he would say next, adding that this was not a complaint, for the great Russian novelists considered people like Harry, spontaneous people, the best in the world. Privately, though, he thought Daley sometimes rather brash. And other friends of his could be ruffled by him. On first being introduced to Forrest Reid, Daley chatted, as he constantly did, about life on the Hammersmith Streets: how Hennekey's stored their cider in old rum or brandy bottles and the local Irish would run mad drunk, by hundreds, on sixpennyworth. 'But don't you find the Irish •navvy lovable in his honesty and simplicity?' asked Reid. 'No I don't,' said Daley. 'They come in fighting drunk; when you search them they've got nothing but pawntickets and rosaries; and then they are sick all over you.' Reid took a strong dislike to Daley and warned Forster against him.

Forster got to know Daley's family in Dorking and would go and chat with his mother, whom he liked, and bring her presents of vegetables. When she fell seriously ill, Joe Ackerley paid for her to see a specialist, who said she must have an operation. The expense worried her, for she knew that Ackerley was not rich; and, hearing this, Forster insisted upon paying all fees himself. Harry wrote to him, vowing eternal gratitude; but by the same post he wrote to his mother – saying, to reassure her, 'Don't worry; old Morgan's got plenty of money' – and contrived to put the letters in the wrong envelopes. Forster was greatly affronted; and, since it was a fixed principle with him never to explain or apologize, or to allow others to do so,¹ the incident rankled on both sides.

* * *

In the Spring of 1926 Forster received an invitation from Trinity College in Cambridge to give the annual Clark Lectures. It pleased him, for these lectures, 'on some period or periods of English literature not earlier than Chaucer', were a distinguished series. (The previous Clark lecturer had been T. S. Eliot.) He agreed without much hesitation, and it was arranged that the lectures should be delivered in the following spring and should take the form of a general discussion of the novel as a *genre*. Over the years, in letters to friends and fellow-novelists, he had sketched many half-formed theories on the subject; however, as he knew, there were vast gaps in his reading, and he now set about filling them. One large gap was the eighteenth century, in which he had done little reading since his undergraduate days – once shocking Virginia Woolf by admitting he had never read Defoe. He now wrote to her for help (17 May 1926):

I am going to give some lectures in Cambridge. I suppose on the novel but am a good deal hung up, & should be very grateful indeed if I might consult you about them . . . Please tell me the names of the best novels – I have only just read *Tristram Shandy* and *Moll Flanders*, so you see.

It was the moment, also, when he must decide his attitude to the *avant-garde* in fiction. It was and would remain to some extent an outsider's attitude. He had not been able to make much of *Ulysses*.

¹ The theory underlying this, I assume, was that whatever actually happens always reveals a truth, if not necessarily the one intended. There is a connection, here, with his habit, when correcting himself in a letter, of deliberately leaving the cancelled words visible.

And he when now read Gide, he found him somewhat disappointing. He wrote to Virginia Woolf (19 November 1926):

Les Faux-Monnayeurs proves not to be a new sort of novel after all – only the throwing-up of an old sponge. There is no punch or colour in it – only more and more interesting, most most interesting

As for Virginia Woolf's own work, he had, in a recent lecture on her, defined a problem which, he had said, 'would inaugurate a new literature if solved', it was for her to 'retain her own wonderful new method and form, and yet allow her readers to inhabit each character with Victorian thoroughness'

He did much of the actual writing of the lectures in the Isle of Wight, while on a visit with his mother to the Preston sisters. It was to be their last visit, for Kate and Maggie died soon afterwards, and it was a sad one. 'Illness and old age are the sole topics,' he told Masood (26 September 1926), 'and whatever is said is repeated 10,000 times. In the midst of it all, on a small lodging house table, I endeavour to prepare my lectures.'

The eight lectures were delivered between January and March 1927. They were very much in a 'Bloomsbury' style – anti-academic, playful, full of odd, brilliant metaphoric flights – and he exploited his habitual simplifying technique, presenting complex matters in the homeliest and most 'bread-and-butter' terms. He was by now a very experienced platform-performer, and the lectures, and their manner – grave, charming, precise, but full of little surprises of *nuance* and inflection – made a great hit with his Cambridge audience.¹ Audiences grew larger and larger, and by the concluding lecture he was reporting to T. E. Lawrence that the series had been the *greatest* success and his 'constant rise to fame' had impeded him from letter-writing. (As we have seen, he found the fame mildly disturbing.) On the strength of this success, King's College offered him a three-year fellowship, which he accepted, on the understanding that he need not reside for more than six weeks in a year.

¹ He was giving them at a time when Cambridge was witnessing the rise of a very different style of criticism. F. R. Leavis, a temperate admirer of Forster's novels, attended the lectures and was enraged by them, finding them 'intellectually null' and their success 'gruesome' and evidence of 'the potent orthodoxy of enlightenment'. (See a letter from Leavis to Oliver Stallybrass in the Introduction to the Abinger edition of *Aspects of the Novel*.)

In the summer of the same year, Virginia Woolf published *To the Lighthouse*, and it made Forster feel that that 'new literature', which he had said was within her grasp, had arrived. At any rate he thought it her best novel, exciting in its formal innovations but at the same time humanly interesting and compelling. He wrote to her (5 June 1927)

It's awfully sad, very beautiful both in (non-radiant) colour and shape, it stirs me much more to questions of whether & why than any thing else you have written. The uneasiness of life seems to well up between all the words, the excitement of life on the other hand to be observed, stated . . .

The praise delighted her, but at this time, the two had a clash. She had written an article¹ on Forster's own work, the main theme of which was the problem of reconciling realism with vision. Forster, she said, faced the same problem as Ibsen. he worked with realism and minute observation, but 'his reality must at certain points become irradiated: his brick must be lit up; we must see the whole building irradiated with light.' Ibsen achieved this, Forster did not quite succeed in it – for the reason that 'that admirable gift of his for observation has served him too well. He has recorded too much and too literally.'

If he were less scrupulous, less just, less sensitively aware of the different aspects of every case, he could, we feel, come down with greater force on one precise point. As it is, the strength of his blow is dissipated. He is like a light sleeper who is always being woken by something in the room. The poet is twitched away by the satirist; the comedian is tapped on the shoulder by the moralist, he never loses himself or forgets himself for long in sheer delight in the beauty or the interest of things as they are.

Forster was shown a draft of the article and was ruffled by it (Part of the trouble, though he didn't tell her so, was that he neither wanted to show her *Maurice* nor to have his work summed up without it.) He wrote to her (28 June 1927):

. . . *I don't believe my method's wrong!* The trouble is I can't work it: through simple lack of the co-ordinating power that Ibsen had. My novels will be either almost-successes or failures – probably in the future almost-successes, because experience enables one to substitute cleverness for force with increasing verisimilitude.

¹ It was published in the *Saturday Review of Literature*, 17 December 1927.

He wrote again, several times indeed, though telling Leonard Woolf that Virginia must be sure not to spoil the article by softening or omitting anything. 'There is no individual phrase that I "mind" in the least' Virginia was surprised, remarking to herself 'Here is this self-possessed aloof man taking every word to heart . . . writing again & again to ask about it'

When, a few months later, his lectures were published as *Aspects of the Novel*, Virginia Woolf reviewed it in the *Nation and Athenaeum*, and her article¹ succeeded more definitely in annoying Forster. Their difference, it now became clear, was one about 'life', a fictional concept dear to both of them. 'There is something – we hesitate to be more precise – which he calls "life",' she wrote in her article:

It is to this that he brings the book of Meredith, Hardy or James for comparison. Always their failure is some failure in relation to life. It is the humane as opposed to the aesthetic view of fiction . . .

But at this point the pertinacious pupil may demand. 'What is this "Life" that keeps on cropping up so mysteriously and so complacently in books about fiction? Why is it absent in a pattern and present in a tea party? Why is the pleasure that we get from the pattern in *The Golden Bowl* less valuable than the emotion which Trollope gives us when he describes a lady drinking tea in a parsonage?'

Forster wrote a piqued rejoinder the next day:

Your article inspires me to the happiest repartee. This vague truth about life. Exactly* But what of the talk about art? Each sentence leads to an exquisitely fashioned casket of which the key has unfortunately been mislaid & until you can find your bunch I shall cease to hunt very anxiously for my own . . . I find the continentals greater than the English not because Flaubert got hung up but because Tolstoy etc., could vitalize guillotines etc., as well as tea-tables, could command certain moods or deeds which our domesticity leads us to shun as false. And why do you complain that no critic in England will judge a novel as a work of art? Percy Lubbock does nothing else. Yet he does not altogether satisfy you. Why?

On the subject of Percy Lubbock, he had, in *Aspects of the Novel* if not here, been a little disingenuous, crediting Lubbock's *The Craft of Fiction* with 'genius and insight', whereas privately he thought it

¹ Reprinted in *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays* (1942).

not much good, 'a sensitive yet poor-spirited book'. Virginia Woolf evidently guessed this. She replied (16 November 1927):

I'm not particularly inspired to repartee by your letter. But I reply - You say 'Each sentence leads to . . . a casket of which the key has unfortunately been mislaid, and until you can find your bunch I shall cease to hunt very anxiously for my own.'

Very well - but then I'm not writing a book about fiction. If I were, I think I should hunt a little. As a reviewer, which is all I am, it seems to be within my province to point out that both bunches are lost . . .

No; Percy Lubbock doesn't 'altogether' satisfy me. But then I don't agree with you that he is a critic of genius. An able and painstaking pedant I should call him, who doesn't know what art is.

. . . The above is official & impersonal. Unofficially & personally I'm afraid I've hurt or annoyed you (perhaps I imagine it). I didn't mean to. The article was cut down to fit the Nation and the weight all fell in the same place . . .

* * *

Forster was in continual correspondence with T. E. Lawrence. Lawrence having at last in 1925 secured a transfer back to the R.A.F., had been serving as an instructor to the Cadets' College at Cranwell, and at the end of the following year he had been posted to Karachi. The friendship between him and Forster had prospered by letter. It had grown clear that what Lawrence wanted was, essentially, a literary friendship - one between an aspiring but self-doubting writer and, as he termed Forster, a 'lord of the pen'. 'I've always stood in the plain, like an ant-hill,' he told Forster, 'watching the mountain and wishing to be one.' As a parting present he had given Forster a copy of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* complete with the Eric Kennington illustrations, promising to inscribe it on his return. 'The inscription I had meant to write,' he told Forster (11 January 1927), 'was "To a swift runner. From one who walks. EMF from TES." But I don't think it fits perfectly. I will use these five years to think of something really good. Can you suggest the attitude of a moon to Jupiter?'

Forster gladly fulfilled his allotted role. Lawrence, while at Cranwell, had produced a revised and slightly shortened version of *Seven Pillars*, and Forster, still zealous on the book's behalf, volunteered to collate this with the 'Oxford' version and adjudicate

between them (The task was to employ him, on and off, for several years, and his final verdict, expressed with much delicacy of discrimination, was in favour of the earlier one ¹) He wanted in all ways to be serviceable to Lawrence and went to some lengths to aid a soldier friend of Lawrence's, 'Posh' Palmer, finding a buyer for his proof-copy of *Seven Pillars* and acting as his 'banker' with the proceeds Altogether, Forster felt much affection and concern for Lawrence 'I believe that reading, thinking, sitting in an aerodrome, are all right for you, and that suddenly you will find the world endurable,' he told him (9 August 1927) 'I wish I could give you my pelt, but if indeed I have one it cannot of course be given.'

Lawrence was re-reading Forster's books, with the idea of writing a critical article on him. 'They beat me,' he told Forster (14 July 1927). 'All over them are sayings (generally terrible) which I feel are bursting out from your heart, and represent yourself, but when I put together a sheet of these, the portrait they make is not the least like you, as I've sat at tea with you.' Forster (9 August 1927) told him not to bother about reconciling the statements in his books with his conduct at the tea-table. 'See whether you can reconcile the statements with each other, and you will find that you cannot, alas that you cannot. And even Virginia Woolf has discovered this.' He had been writing a new story, 'Dr Woolacott', but he did not at once offer to send it, being puzzled by Lawrence's attitude to his homosexual writings. 'Do you remember,' he asked Lawrence, ' . . . a novel I mentioned to you. I offered you the reading of it when you were in England, but you did not seem keen. I did not understand why. There are items which you must have in your mind if you want to sum me up. Virginia Woolf, deprived of the items, has just made the attempt.' Lawrence's answer (8 September 1927) was revealing.

I wanted to read your long novel, & was afraid to. It was like your last keep, I felt: and if I read it I had you: and supposing I hadn't

¹ Letter to T. E. Lawrence, 18 January 1931. 'What I was trying to say is that you can handle a theme (write a book), describe an action of state of mind (write a chapter), and write sentences that are awfully good as sentences, but which are sometimes too carefully wrought, with the result that the context, and the paragraph, suffers. "Then the chapter and through it the book suffers." No. literature isn't so logical. The desiccatedness blows off by the time we get to the larger items, and in the smallest (the sentences) it sparkles as individual crystals, but the intermediate, the paragraphs, occasionally bear a brunt, and move a little slowly and dryly . . .'

liked it? I'm so funnily made up, sexually At present you are in all respects right, in my eyes. that's because you reserve so very much, as I do. If you knew all about me (perhaps you do: your subtlety is very great. shall I put it 'if I knew that you knew . . .') you'd think very little of me. And I wouldn't like to feel that I was on the way to being able to know about you

Forster told Lawrence he liked his reasons for not wanting to read *Maurice*. Nevertheless, at Lawrence's request, he sent him 'Dr Woolacott',¹ and Lawrence's response to the story was rapturous. He told Forster, 'It's the most powerful thing I ever read . . . more charged with the real high explosive than anything I've ever met yet. And the odd extraordinary thing is that you go about talking quite carefully to us ordinary people . . .' Forster, always anxious for reassurance about his homosexual writings, was proportionately grateful, and wrote (17 November 1927):

Yes, I know Doctor Woolacott is the best thing I've done and also unlike any one else's work. I am very glad it got you. I hope you will write again and at length. I wanted to know, among other things when you first guessed the oncomer was a spook. Not until the cupboard or before? The story makes me happy It gives bodily ecstasy outside time and place. I shall never be able to give it again, and once is something

Odd that in my daily life I should be so timid and ingratiating and consequently so subject to pain. Your letter helps me a lot. I have gone through the story today in my mind, with the knowledge you have read it, and this [comforts me strengthens] hardens (got it!) me.

I believe, as you know, that you are a 'greater genius than myself' to use the dreary phrase, and put this in here to explain my attitude to you and the things I say. Not for any other reason. Don't contradict me - only wastes time. Write again about Doctor Woolacott.

From your friend: -

Edward Morgan Forster

Lawrence duly sent a long letter, ending:

There is a strange cleansing beauty about the whole piece of writing. So passionate, of course: so indecent people might say: but I must confess that it has made me change my point of view. I had not before believed that such a thing could be presented - and so credited. I suppose you will not print it? Not that it

¹ Published in *The Life to Come and Other Stories* (1972).

anywhere says too much but it shows far more than it says' and these things are mysteries. The Turks, as you probably know (or have guessed, through the reticences of the Seven Pillars) did it to me, by force and since then I have gone about whimpering to myself unclean, unclean. Now I don't know. Perhaps there is another side, your side, to the story. I couldn't ever do it, I believe: the impulse strong enough to make me touch another creature has not yet been born in me but perhaps in surrender to such a figure as your Death there might be a greater realization – and thereby a more final destruction – of the body than any loneliness can reach.

Meanwhile I am in your debt for an experience of such strength and sweetness and bitterness and hope as seldom comes to anyone. I wish my account of it were not so vaguely inadequate and I cannot suggest 'more when we meet' for it will be hard to speak of these things without dragging our own conduct and bodies into the argument: and that's too late, in my case.

Forster agreed to the 'not more when we meet'. He told Lawrence 'It is natural for me to drag my own body and conduct into an argument (should be dotty and sterile but for these and other outlets), so you may every now and then have to fend me off, but I shall never feel snubbed when you do.' Lawrence's feeling for the story became, for Forster, a permanent bond between them. He told Lawrence, 'It is the experience of a lifetime to get such praise and I don't think of it as praise . . . What you have *written* has the effect of something absolute on me.'

A month or two later, it was his own turn to give encouragement. Lawrence, back in 1922, had kept some notes on his first experience of barrack life – indeed, to do so had been one of his motives for enlisting as an 'other rank'. Now, with Edward Garnett's encouragement, he was considering converting the notes into a book, and he asked Forster to borrow them from Garnett and give his opinion on them. There ensued, on a smaller scale, the experience of *Seven Pillars*. Forster read the notes (later to become *The Mint*), and admired them very greatly, sending Lawrence a letter that he found 'wonderful' and that strengthened his resolve to complete the book. 'If I just say "book's good – masterpiece" you'll be neither helped or amused,' wrote Forster:

The first two parts are superbly written – the third part is a little odd: will come to it later. The style is constricted yet fresh – exactly what is needed to express the guts of men, and they have

never been expressed before: spiritual or scientific detachment or licentious sympathy have all three had their try and all failed. You have got the new view point and the words in which can be put . .

Now you give good reasons both for the style (epistolary) and for the matter of Part III, so what I am about to say is empty but what I wish is that you could have taken up your narrative from the moment when you left the depot, described your dismissal, touched on the Tanks, described your readmission, and then gone ahead. Plenty of reasons, dynastic and personal, against this no doubt: I am only saying what I wish. As it is the transition is into another medium, into a sort of comforting bath water, where I sat contented and surprised, but not convinced that I was being cleansed. You hadn't, that is to say, communicated your happiness to me. Which is difficult to do, we know. But I think more could have been done if you hadn't made the big leap in time and could *also* have put away from your heart and head the notion that you ought to be fair, and emphasize the pleasanter side of the R.A.F. before laying down your pen. 'For fairness' sake' (p. 122) were the words that caused me to prick my literary ears, and I am trying to keep to literature for the reason that I am unlikely to be useful as any other sort of animal.

Summing up as such, I inform you that *The Mint* is not as great a work as *The Seven Pillars*, either in colour or form, but it is more new, more startling and more heartening than either *The S.P.* or anything else I've read . . . It's heartening because it shows that cruelty is accidental and abnormal, not basic. I have known this sitting in drawing rooms and gardens, but you have gone to places where I should smash and scream in 30 seconds, and bring back the same news. A world of infinite suffering, but of limited cruelty: that's what one has to face.

* * *

From time to time, since his last visit to India, Forster had received news from Dewas. The Maharaja rarely wrote letters now, but every now and then he would despatch a friendly cable or send messages through the Darlings to 'that noblest specimen of humanity, Morgan'. Josie Darling, in her capacity as the Maharaja's 'sister', had gone to visit him on her own in 1924, finding him as fascinating as ever but, she thought, unwise and neglectful in his handling of his son Vikramsinha. He rarely saw Vikramsinha, who was now thirteen years old, and left him in the charge of a tutor called Sharma, well known to be a Kolhapur spy.¹ It seemed great folly to her, and she

¹ The Darlings had long disliked Sharma. When Vikramsinha came to stay with them for the summer of 1916 in Dalhousie, they sent Sharma packing.

made what protest she could, writing to Malcolm, in German for fear her letter should be opened: 'Du lieber Gott, was kann mann thun daruber – muss ich von Merz am meiner Bruder sprechen.'

Her anxiety was well-founded, for in January 1928 news of an appalling scandal appeared in the press. Vikramsinha, who was by now married, had fled from Dewas, in the company of Sharma, accusing his father of trying to seduce his wife and to poison him.¹ He had taken sanctuary with the British Resident at Indore, going a day or two later to join his mother in Kolhapur, and the newspapers carried a lengthy story of intrigue at Dewas, depicting the Maharaja as under the evil influence of a 'dancing-girl' (i.e. Bai Saheba). Forster, after a week or two, received confirmation of the flight from the Darlings. Malcolm had gone at once to Dewas and had found the Maharaja distraught, begging for Malcolm's advice but paying not the slightest attention to it, and raging against his 'enemies', who now in his eyes included the British. So far as Darling could make out, he was innocent of all crime; but he was doing everything he could to blacken himself further – showing vindictiveness towards Vikramsinha, proposing absurd bargains over Vikramsinha's guardianship, and insisting there must be no official enquiry into the flight. Josie wrote Forster a long analysis of the affair, as she and Malcolm interpreted it, concluding: 'If the villain of the plot has been Sharma in the pay of Kolhapur, the Ikonoklast which has wrecked Tukoji's² reputation has been that fearful blob – "The dignity of an Indian Prince: the honour of my state"'.³ Meanwhile Darling had interceded with the Resident at Indore and had written to the *Times of India* on the Maharaja's behalf. He urged Forster to do what he could in the English press, and Forster wrote to various newspapers in the Maharaja's defence, his letter being printed in the *Daily News* for 16 January, under the heading 'THE SCANDAL IN DEWAS'.

Sir, – I have read with amazement and incredulity the account of the alleged conduct of the Maharajah of Dewas (Senior Branch) as reported by your Bombay Correspondent in your issue of January 10, and would respectfully suggest that your readers should reserve their judgement until they have heard the other

¹ Vikramsinha, who eventually succeeded to the throne of Kolhapur, came in later years to think that he had misjudged his father.

² i.e. the Maharaja.

³ Letter dated 2 February 1928

side. Your correspondent, though of course he reports in good faith, has clearly come under the influences that have proved so sinister in Dewas in the past.

I have known his Highness for nearly sixteen years now. I have lived in his State and seen a little of the intrigues against which he has had to contend and the forbearance that he has exercised. He is a true friend, a great gentleman, and a saint. He has incidentally, one of the finest minds in India. The notion that such a man should persecute his daughter-in-law and attempt to poison his son and heir is perfectly preposterous.

Neither his nor Darling's efforts could achieve much. The harm was done, and the Maharaja's reputation was in ruins.¹

* * *

The tiff, such as it had been, between Forster and Virginia Woolf had soon subsided, and in the course of 1928 the two became allies in the *Well of Loneliness* case. The notorious Lesbian novel by Radclyffe Hall had been published in July 1928, and a few weeks later the *Sunday Express* had made a front-page story of it, as being a threat to the nation's morals. ('I would rather,' said the editor, 'give a healthy boy or a healthy girl a phial of prussic acid than this novel.') The publishers, Jonathan Cape, published a letter in next day's *Daily Express* defending the book as decent and sincere, but saying they were sending copies to the Home Office and the Public Prosecutor and promising to withdraw the novel from circulation if either found it objectionable. The Home Secretary, 'Jix',² did object, so the book was duly withdrawn; and at this point various of the *Nation* circle, the Woolfs and Forster among them, grew interested in the case. Forster, reminded of his own 'unpublishable' novel, saw it as a challenge and responded energetically. With Leonard Woolf's help he drafted a public letter of protest, persuading various literary friends and acquaintances, like Lytton Strachey and Arnold Bennett, to sign it; and at the same time he got in touch with Radclyffe Hall. And here difficulty began. For his proposed letter dealt merely with the legal aspect of the suppression, saying 'We offer no opinion on either the merits or the decency of the book.' This would not do for the author at all. She wanted her book to be championed and sent. Forster her own version of how his letter ought to run. He now went to see her, and, to begin with the monocled and lounge-suited novelist

¹ See Appendix (pp. 333-6) for further details

² Sir William Joynson-Hicks, first Viscount Brentford (1865-1932).

was all friendliness and gratitude, however, at some point in the conversation, Forster incautiously hinted a mild criticism of her novel, and at this she grew violent, refusing all support from him and his friends unless her book were proclaimed not only pure but a masterpiece. This was more than he had bargained for, for he thought the book ill-written and pretentious, and he wondered how to proceed. He reported the meeting to his friends, and Arnold Bennett, though he had described the book in the *Evening Standard* as 'honest, convincing and extremely courageous', turned out privately to share Forster's feelings about it. He told Forster he would not sign such a letter as she desired 'even if the co-signatories were all the swells in the world', and he advised Forster to drop the matter 'You have behaved in a noble manner, and she will perceive this later on, when she gets calmer.'

Forster wished himself out of the affair, but, having begun, he felt he must persist. The round-robin having been abandoned, he published in the *Nation and Athenaeum* for 1 September an anonymous article entitled 'The New Censorship', condemning the suppression as 'an insidious blow at the liberties of the public' and saying that 'further attacks may be anticipated unless an effective protest can be made now' The article brought some response, and in the following issue Forster and Virginia Woolf signed a joint letter, saying that the *Well* had evidently been suppressed, not for indecency; but simply because of its theme.

The subject-matter of the book exists as a fact among the many other facts of life. It is recognized by science and recognizable in history. It forms, of course, an extremely small fraction of the sum-total of human emotions, it enters personally into very few lives, and it is uninteresting or repellent to the majority, nevertheless it exists, and novelists in England have now been forbidden to mention it by Sir W. Joynson-Hicks. May they mention it incidentally? Although it is forbidden as a main theme, may it be alluded to, or ascribed to subsidiary characters? Perhaps the Home Secretary will issue further orders on this point. And is it the only taboo, or are there others? What of the other subjects known to be more or less unpopular in Whitehall, such as birth-control, suicide, and pacifism? May we mention these? We await our instructions! . . .

At about this time, he went down for a weekend with the Woolfs in Sussex, and, prompted by the *Well* affair, the conversation turned

to male and female homosexuality. Forster told the Woolfs that a certain Doctor Head claimed to be able to 'convert' homosexuals. 'And would you like to be converted?' asked Leonard. 'No,' said Forster, without hesitation. From this they got on to lesbianism. He and Virginia were both a little tipsy, and with a queer burst of frankness he told her he found it disgusting – partly out of conventionality, and partly because he 'disliked the idea of women being independent of men' Virginia was not outraged. Indeed, this weekend, they were unusually in harmony, and to her diary she confided that he was 'timid, touchy, infinitely charming'.

Soon after this, the police brought a prosecution against *The Well of Loneliness*. The case was to be heard at Bow Street in November, and Forster busied himself recruiting fellow-writers to appear as expert witnesses. Meanwhile Radclyffe Hall herself, having secured public declarations on her behalf from Shaw and Wells, was – as she told Forster – rallying the support of the 'working people', obtaining signed protests from the National Union of Railwaymen and the South Wales Miners' Federation. On the day of the trial, a distinguished array of writers had assembled at Bow Street, and all seemed set for a dramatic confrontation – a *Lady Chatterley* trial thirty years before its time – but, in the event, the magistrate refused to call expert evidence and pronounced the book obscene on his own authority.

Forster felt flat at this outcome to his campaign; still he did not feel it had been profitless. It had, moreover, given him a feeling of usefulness. As a non-practising novelist, he had been feeling the need for some outlet into public activity, and the *Well* case had given him his line. From now on he would often be heard on the censorship issue, and, by extension from this, on civil liberties generally.

During this year, too, he became active in the International P.E.N. club. The P.E.N., an association for established authors, dedicated to 'the freedom of literature and the friendship of nations', had been founded in 1921, with Galsworthy as its first President. Forster had joined in 1927, and, in the present year, he became the first president of a new and subsidiary body called the 'Young P.E.N.', a club for young and unknown writers. At its inaugural meeting, in the University of London club in Gower Street, he gave a semi-autobiographical talk about 'Inspiration', and in the following year he took the chair at the annual dinner (finding it rather 'tire-

some', and taking a dislike to the guest of honour, J. B Priestley).

* * *

Masood had arrived in England in the autumn of 1928; he had brought with him his sons Anwar and Akbar, and they had all been to stay at West Hackhurst. His affairs were in confusion. His marriage had broken down, and his wife Zorah had gone back to her parents' home in Aligarh, on the boat to England he had announced to the children that he was divorcing her. He was also in some kind of indefinite retirement from his post in Hyderabad. With Forster's help, he found places for the boys at the Perse School in Cambridge, and spoke vaguely of settling in Europe. Forster was worried on his behalf – also a little irritated. 'Masood is here,' he wrote to Sprott (23 September 1928) 'He has cut himself off from his own country in masterly fashion and for good reasons, and now the reaction starts. Boys placed at school, Jaeger underclothing bought, presents given to old friends. What next? I recommend Paris feebly – to take a flat there was his ideal once.' Masood followed his advice and went to Paris, and from there, after a while, he moved on to Frankfurt. There he fell ill with Spanish 'flu, and from his sickbed he wrote forlornly to his friends that he was 'standing alone in the midst of the ruin of my life' and had nothing in the world to cheer him 'except the memory of things and deeds now long dead'. He sounded in serious straits, and in December Forster went over to Germany to see him, finding him quite recovered and cheerfully lunching and dining about town in the company of seven Germans, an Indian and a Czech.

Masood continued on his travels during the early months of 1929 – living, so Forster thought, with monstrous extravagance – and then, in the stock-market crash of that year, he found himself ruined. His situation now looked bleak. However, at this juncture, he received the offer of a high political post in Hyderabad; and, while he was considering this, there arrived a cable inviting him to become Vice-Chancellor of the M.A.O. University at Aligarh – the famous college founded by his grandfather, raised in 1920 to university status. The choice puzzled him. The post at Aligarh would be much the less well paid, and Forster urged him to refuse it because of the painfulness of Zorah's presence at Aligarh. However, his guardian Sir Theodore Morison insisted that he had no choice. He must accept Aligarh – the more so that the University was in a bad way, being very nearly

bankrupt and widely accused of corruptly selling its degrees. 'This is the call of your blood,' Sir Theodore told him, and – unwisely as it turned out – Masood took his advice.

There remained the problem of the children. Anwar was now thirteen and Akbar eleven. They were both very charming, intelligent and enterprising boys (physically very large like their father – Anwar was almost a giant), and Lily and Forster had been much taken with them. Forster promised to keep a close eye on them, and over the next few years they could come for long stays at West Hackhurst during the school holidays, treating Forster as a sort of parent.

* * *

By the present year Forster's affair with Harry Daley had cooled. The truth was, they were not well matched. Daley was too indiscreet for Forster, who told Ackerley he was sure Harry would one day have them all in the dock. Also he was too uncertain-tempered and prone to writing abusive letters. Moreover, so Forster thought, Harry aimed at too many roles: intellectual, man of the people, socialite, sexual emancipator and so on. 'Harry never could do things in style,' he told Ackerley, 'he places too many models before himself.' As for Harry, he was irked at being 'mothered' by Forster – exploding once to a friend, 'He's whimsical *and* interfering. It's not fair!' He also formed the impression, which was correct, that Forster employed Ackerley as a go-between, deputing him to ask Harry questions as if on his own behalf and to report the answers. Harry once complained to them: 'It isn't a friendship, it's a conspiracy' at which Forster merely smiled and wagged his head. There was no dramatic rupture between them at this time, though there was to be later, and – as Ackerley's friend rather than his own – Forster still saw him quite often. During 1928 Ackerley had at last taken a job, as a director in the B.B.C.'s newly-formed Talks Department. He had responsibility for a series called 'The Day's Work', and Forster and he coached Daley, and other of their working-class friends, to appear on it. Daley gave several talks about a policeman's life, winning for a time some mild fame as a broadcaster, and beginning, with less success, to write short stories and articles.

As for Forster himself, he was feeling rather 'off' literature. He told Sassoon (9 January 1929) that if he could say something which would help avert another war, or give men more courage in their daily lives, he would say it, but anything else seemed to him mere

'pattern-weaving' and self-expression. He had been reading Eddington's *The Nature of the Physical World* and thought that it put mere literary speculation to shame. In a Commonplace Book, begun a year or two before, he made on 5 January 1929 a long entry on Eddington, saying that he wanted to record, 'like the extra sounds one catches immediately after one's ear is squirted out', his first sensations on realizing that matter was not solid, that one knew everything through measurements only, that his own 'spasmodic instincts and confusions about Time' had a value, and that one thing only – the quantum – had existence in the physical world.

Coming at a moment when I felt literature and myself were played out, the book has convinced me that there is life in the latter-named yet, while it had increased my mistrust of thoughtful generalizations about poetry, philosophic by-the-ways, and all that, and even of that fancifulness which in my own writing, may have justified such solemnities. The seriousness of a large housefly can't be taken very seriously. I don't think literature will be purged until its philosophic pretentiousness is extruded, and I shan't live to see that purge, nor perhaps when it has happened will anything survive. I think if a new race would be born, unbothered by sunsets etc., a new literature *might* be born, but the spurious clouds of glory still trail round the writer and prevent him either accepting or rejecting the second law of thermodynamics.

He was also rather 'off' Cambridge. At least, he did not altogether enjoy his official life as a fellow, though, personally, he liked both the dons and the undergraduates and felt he was a success with them. The trouble was, he had no real or settled work in Cambridge. Also, the place cut him off from his working-class friends – for he did not feel he could well have them to stay there. Moreover such London friends as he did invite seemed to dislike both King's and Cambridge. Joe Ackerley went quite silent and gloomy when he came on a visit, and Leo Charlton, after he had come to stay, wrote warning Forster not 'to exchange your pleasant sunny bow-window upon life for a Norman arrow-head looking north'.

His London friends wanted him to live in Hammersmith, but this prospect did not attract him either. Hammersmith life, as lived by Joe Ackerley and his friends, seemed to him to have a fatal flaw; it was destroyed by gossip, which wrecked both human relationships and work. 'Why need you meet Harry?' he had once asked Sebastian

Sprott 'Why must everyone meet everyone? I am sick of it' He felt sure that Joe Ackerley would never write anything while he lived this life. His own few years of it had given him a vision of what he named the 'cat circus'. 'I have got a sort of cat-ring feeling,' he told Ackerley; 'so many Dicks, so many Toms. I suppose there is something secretive about me – unless I am merely growing old and don't secrete enough.'



What he would have liked for himself, at least in fantasy, was something more on the Edward Carpenter lines, a rustic and working-class idyll. He still half thought of Frank Vicary as the key to it. He often went to see Frank in the country, feeling relief at the escape from 'gentility'. Vicary had given up his job as a miner some years before, for health reasons, and had become a ship's steward. Next he had taken a fancy for farming, and Forster had set him up as a pig-breeder, buying him some land and a cottage in Gloucestershire. The farm had not flourished – nothing of Frank's ever did – and then, in 1928, one of his children died accidentally and horribly, being scalded in his bath. The tragedy more or less destroyed Vicary, who became feckless and morose. Later in the same year Forster discovered that Vicary was badly in debt and, without telling him, had raised a large mortgage on the farm. Forster was shocked and blamed himself for having let Frank drift. Frank was still so charming and, every now and then, still said such original, imaginative things, that he had not wanted to face the truth about him. The farm, too, he recognized ruefully, had been a solace to his own day-dreams. He had pictured himself 'toddling there in old age, looked after by the robust and grateful lower classes'.

* * *

In this year, 1929, he was, in fact, rather at a loose end – doing a little reviewing and lecturing (he toured the Midlands in February, giving a centenary lecture on Ibsen), but planning no book. Thus when the Bangers invited him to come to South Africa with them, on a cruise organized by the British Association, he accepted for want of a good reason for refusing. Having accepted, he became apprehensive. He would not exactly be in his element, amid a party of four or five hundred scientists, and it would be the sort of official tour he had no liking for: they would, he guessed, 'be shown everything and see nothing'. Moreover, he had a feeling – it was a recurrent fear with him – that he was losing his power of taking in new experiences.

It was to be an extensive tour. They would stop first at the Cape, then make their way to Johannesburg and to Rhodesia, and proceed thence by ship to Kenya, visiting Zanzibar *en route*. And from Kenya Forster planned to make his own way home, spending some days in Egypt. They set off in late June. Florence was in high spirits, praising everything, despite George's quenching remarks, and thrilled at the prospect of long *tête-à-têtes* with her adored Morgan. Forster was not in such high spirits, and, though he loved Florence, he now, intermittently, found her a bore – too voluble, too appreciative, too high-minded and sentimental. He concealed this and danced attendance on her very loyally, but the cruise turned out, as he had feared, only a half-enjoyed experience. He kept a diary, and through it there runs a note of jadedness – a mixture of rational distaste for some of the scenes he observed and a private vision of savourless, joyless middle age.¹

He received, none the less, a few intense experiences, one being the island of St Helena, where they called on the voyage out. This strange island, so rocky and inhospitable but inhabited by gentle birds and gentle people, captured his imagination. 'Views over crags of lava and the soft radiant sea, and birds of fairy-white called "love-terns" nest in the crevices. . . . Have seldom seen such a touching island,' he wrote to Joe Ackersley; 'all the volcanic sternness and the live things perched about in it, longing for kindness and company. Some day we will go and give it to them.' He was impressed powerfully too, as by a kind of hellish contrast to this gentle vision, by the Kimberley diamond mines:

29 July. Kimberley or the Kingdom of Antichrist. Four tram loads of us in the grey morning rolling past barbed wire, more inventive than I've ever seen – loops  and even crowns , quite beautiful. Some fences ended abruptly, as if run up for the infernal joy of the thing, others both sides of a ditch, at one place tram plunged through a cutting. Led into an enclosure where a few black-and-red jerseyed convicts were at work, and to a shed containing piles of the imbecile stones . . .

¹ The note recurs in his essay, 'Luncheon at Pretoria', in *Two Cheers for Democracy*. 'We went into the drawing-room and talked a little, and then went into the dining-room and talked a little more and ate and drank a little. It would be unjust to call us a set of dull dogs. We were not dogs, we were not even dull. We were not amusing or bored or critical or cross or anything. We were just a collection of well-fed people who did not know one another well and did not want to . . .'

On his return to England he sold his African mining shares.

In general, Africa saddened him. 'Most of the African peoples seem simply heart-broken,' he told Joe Ackerley (9 September 1929); 'they wander about as if their lives were lost; trade and Christianity together have done them in.' He was moved – almost to tears, he told Ackerley – by the new Union Government buildings at Pretoria. They struck him as genuinely noble, in their way, and a fine gesture of English and Boer *rapprochement*; but 'such an empty gesture, for beneath and beyond both English and Dutch are these millions of blacks whom one never speaks to and whose existence one assumes as one does electric bells! That was why I nearly cried at Pretoria. It is Valhalla, and the dwarfs haven't been paid'

His spirits did not really rise till he was back in Egypt, and, then, he told Joe Ackerley, having been 250 years old a fortnight back, he could now knock off the nought. Once more on his own, he enjoyed himself in the manner that suited him, going to see Cavafy and his other friends, and paying a nostalgic visit to the 'Home of Misery'. 'Egypt after the British Empire,' he told Joe, 'is more wonderful, beautiful and amusing than can well be imagined.'

His spirits rose even higher when, on his way home, he had an enjoyable sexual escapade with a French sailor, named Achille, in Toulon. He had planned to stay some more days in France, visiting the Maurons, but, on collecting his mail from England, he found a letter from Joe Ackerley, and the news it contained brought him hurrying home. It was that Ackerley's father had died, and that, from a letter marked 'Only in the case of my death,' Joe had learned that his father had been supporting a second family, secreting them in a house only a mile or two from Richmond; and that, partly in consequence, Joe and his mother and sister would be left nearly penniless.¹ 'This house of cards has indeed come tumbling about my ears with Dad's death, a month ago today,' he wrote (3 October 1929). 'There isn't really – I'd better forewarn you – even a chink of sky to be seen; the wreckage is so overwhelming and complete.'

Forster, on his return to England, gave Ackerley what advice and support he could. 'Your best friends, i.e. Leo and self, walked about

¹ The story is related in Ackerley's *My Father and Myself* (1968) and from another angle in *The Secret Orchard of Roger Ackerley* (1975) by Diana Petre, one of Ackerley's half-sisters

here [West Hackhurst] yesterday, important and thoughtful but completely futile,' he told him (12 October 1929). 'The dog came too. We all felt that you would not realize you have no money till the trades people won't send you any food.' Ackerley was faced with a moral problem: his father had left word asking him to give his mistress the benefit of a £2,000 insurance policy – one of his few remaining assets – but his father's business partners were scornful of this 'sentimental blackmail' and refused to give his mother any sort of pension unless he ignored it. Joe discussed the matter, uncomfortably, with Forster and others, but in the end could see no alternative but to acquiesce in the partners' demand. He moved his mother into a smaller house; and in a little while the drama subsided, and was supplanted in his mind by his miseries over Albert J—

His affair with Albert was breaking up. It was, his friends thought, largely his fault. He mishandled Albert, growing absurdly possessive, and unreasonably resentful when, as sometimes happened, Albert broke appointments. He was both excited by and wanted to ignore the fact that Albert was working-class, and this, his friends thought, was unfair on Albert. Forster read him many homilies on the class-issue. He wrote to him early on in the affair:

You must go very easily on Albert. The standards which are so obvious to you are very remote to him and his class, and he was bound to lapse from them sooner or later. And by standards I mean not only conventional methods of feeling. He can be quite deeply attached to you and yet suddenly find the journey up too much of a fag. It is difficult for us with our middle class training to realize this, but it is so.

For a time, impatient at only seeing Albert at weekends, Ackerley took rooms in Portsmouth in order to play the faithful housewife to him – only succeeding by this in irritating and boring Albert. Soon afterwards, they had a more-or-less final quarrel. It reduced Ackerley to such a plight that he would barge blindly into people in the street.

The fundamental trouble, Forster thought, was that Ackerley was one of those who can learn nothing from experience. As for himself, he could and did learn from experience. After two or three years of casual affairs, he had come to look at them more dispassionately. 'I'm not romantic, not like you – at least not any more,' he wrote to Ackerley (25 January 1930). 'I like these flowers, and life would be

lovely if a new one sprouted every day, but I've learnt how they wither. Here and there stands something solid and *conscious* . . . but the rest wither, whether I pick them or not.'

* * *

Over the years, Forster had kept up a remote contact with D. H. Lawrence, sending him his books as they were published and receiving back brief but affectionate letters 'Yes I think of you,' Lawrence wrote from New Mexico (22 September 1922); 'of you saying to me, on top of the downs in Sussex - "How do you know I'm not dead?" - Well, you can't be dead, since here's your script But I think you *did* make a nearly deadly mistake glorifying those *business* people in Howards End. Business is no good' Two years later, he wrote from Baden Baden to thank Forster for *Pharos and Pharillon* 'Sad as ever, like a lost soul calling Ichabod. But I prefer the sadness to the Stracheyism. To me you are the last Englishman And I am the one after that' In his letter acknowledging *A Passage to India* (23 July 1924), Lawrence told Forster, ' . . . there's not a soul in England says a word to me - save your whisper through the willow boughs.' From time to time during these years, Forster would read another of Lawrence's novels - forming a preference for *The Plumed Serpent*. He regarded their friendship as one of his 'failures' and did not often think of Lawrence, but when he did it was with admiration, and he was moved by the news of his death in 1930 and angered by the hostility of the obituaries¹ The latter stirred him to write to the *Nation and Athenaeum* (29 March 1930).

Now he is dead, and the low-brows whom he scandalized have united with the high-brows whom he bored to ignore his greatness. This cannot be helped; no one who alienates both Mrs Grundy and Aspatia [*sic*] can hope for a good obituary press. All that we can do . . . is to say straight out that he was the greatest imaginative novelist of our generation The rest must be left where he would have wished it to be left - in the hands of the young

¹ *The Times* obituary said. ' . . . There was that in his intellect which might have made him one of England's greatest writers, and did indeed make him the writer of some things worthy of the best of English literature. But as time went on and his disease took a firmer hold, his rage and his fear grew upon him. He confused decency with hypocrisy, and honesty with the free and public use of vulgar words. At once fascinated and horrified by physical passion, he paraded his disgust and fear in the trappings of a showy masculinity.'

His letter, together with an appreciative tribute to Lawrence by Lady Ottoline Morrell,¹ stirred up a controversy. T. S. Eliot wrote in the next week's issue, in his most niggling manner:

I am the last person to wish to disparage the genius of Lawrence, or to disapprove when a writer of the eminence of Mr Forster speaks 'straight out'. But the virtue of speaking straight out is somewhat diminished if what one speaks is not sense. And unless we know exactly what Mr Forster means by *greatest*, *imaginative*, and *novelist*, I submit that this judgement is meaningless. For there are at least three 'novelists' of 'our generation' – two of whom are living – for whom a similar claim might be made.

This exhibited a side to Eliot that Forster had always disliked,* and – being a skilled conversationalist when occasion demanded – he transfixed Eliot in the following issue with a few quiet and devastating words.

Mr Eliot duly entangles me in his web. He asks what exactly I mean by 'greatest', 'imaginative' and 'novelist' and I cannot say. Worst still, I cannot even say what 'exactly' means – only that there are occasions when I would rather feel like a fly than a spider, and that the death of D. H. Lawrence is one of these.

Lawrence was not much liked in Bloomsbury, and Clive Bell now joined the controversy, with a rather foolish and tetchy letter, asking Forster what he meant by 'straight out' and by 'high-brow'. Perhaps, he said, speaking 'straight out' merely meant being uncritical. 'That, I admit, is a quality which Mr Forster may have reason to admire.' Forster demolished him equally effortlessly, replying:

I cannot tell Mr Clive Bell the meaning of 'straight out' and 'high-brow' until he has defined what he means by 'meaning', but I would like to remind your other readers that my letter, which occasioned his questions, was occasioned by the death of D. H. Lawrence. They may not have agreed with what I said . . . but they will scarcely misunderstand it or bark their shins on every word unless they are expert controversialists. These, very properly, form a race apart, with difficulties and methods of their own . . .

He received a letter from Frieda, giving an exalted and eloquent account of Lawrence's death. He had, however, never quite liked

¹ 'D. H. Lawrence, 1885–1930: By one of his friends', *Nation and Athenaeum*, 22 March 1930.

Frieda's Laurentianism, or indeed Frieda herself, and her letter did not change his attitude. When, soon afterwards, she came to see him, he recorded the visit wryly in his *Commonplace Book*

D. H. Lawrence's Frieda, seen last week after an interval of 15 years, still uttered the old war cries . . . but her manner was nervous, almost propitiatory, and I realize that she, and perhaps he, were as afraid of me as I could have been of them. There was something both pretentious and rotten about her, as in his pictures. She would rebuke me for disobeying the Message and then stop and watch me with a shy smile. Very proud of having no friends, equally so of her apparatus for collecting and compelling them. – And the tripe without the poetry was not attractive, and I retired unashamed into my academic tower. He and she haven't had a bad life, but it seems vulgar when they proclaim it as *Ensample* and a *Mystery*

* * *

Every year, since his move to riverside Hammersmith, Joe Ackerley had held a party on the day of the Oxford *v* Cambridge boatrace. They were large, miscellaneous gatherings, attended by all his friends: writers, actors and B.B.C. acquaintances, policemen and guardsmen, his mother, his aunt and neighbours Forster came regularly, and during the one in 1930 he was introduced to a police constable named Bob Buckingham. He was one of Harry Daley's fellow-policemen from the Hammersmith Section House: a large, genial, good-looking young man, with a nose flattened in the boxing-ring and a resounding bass laugh. They chatted about the river, a subject which Buckingham was knowledgeable upon, and also about books. Buckingham said he had been reading Dostoevsky, and Forster promised, when they met again, to lend him Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist* and his own *A Passage to India*. He was taken with Buckingham, and, more to the point, Buckingham seemed taken with him. Forster invited him to Brunswick Square,¹ a few days hence, when he duly lent him the books, and before long they were meeting often. Buckingham proved as good a talker, in his way, as Harry had been, conversing very knowledgeably about the life of the Hammersmith streets. They discussed books a little, too. Till now, despite Dostoevsky, Buckingham had not been much of a reader,

¹ At about this time he had had to give up his flat at 27 Brunswick Square (his landlady Mrs Marshall having been unable to renew the lease of the house) and had moved next door, to No. 26.

but he showed himself eager to learn, and Forster enjoyed taking charge of his reading. Before long, Buckingham became confiding, and from there on they would talk about his life and problems.

Bob Buckingham, who was to become very important in Forster's life, was now twenty-eight. He came from a large and very poor family, living in Somerstown, and before joining the police he had had countless other occupations: docker, loader for a parcel-delivery firm, apprentice instrument-maker, mechanic, boot-and-shoe salesman. Much of the time, too, he had been out of work, living – as did many of his friends – on cocoa and dripping-toast, and earning a few shillings at Christmas by sweeping snow. His father was a bad provider, often absent for months at a time, and, from early on, Bob had tended to take his place, supporting his brothers and sisters as best he could on his meagre earnings. He was, or had been born, one of the very poor who in *Howards End* are described as 'un-thinkable'.

He had survived with great resilience, becoming a warm-hearted, broad-minded, responsible man, with a patronizing manner – a manner which could sometimes annoy people. He loved to be in the know (a *trait* of the police generally) and was very quick to pick up a new tone. Up to now he had been essentially a 'hearty', fond of blue jokes, and mad on sports and games, which he played with furious concentration; but, having got to know Forster, he changed. Harry Daley, who was jealous over Forster, would remark, maliciously, what a highbrow Bob had become of a sudden – how Bob would affect an interesting stutter and tell his friends what was wrong with the Albert Memorial and what they should look out for at the Tate Gallery. Bob, for his part, treated Harry as a sort of licensed lunatic. He refused to countenance Harry's gaolbird friends, but not censoriously, merely treating Harry as a hopeless case. He would put his arm round him affectionately, sighing, 'Oh Harry, you *are* a fool.'

It went with much else in Bob Buckingham that, having once attached himself to Forster, he did the thing with thoroughness and became intensely loyal, demanding a similar faithfulness. This suited Forster admirably, and in the early days of their friendship he trod very cautiously, doing his best to prevent gossip among the 'cat-ringing'. 'I must re-emphasize the need of silence about Bob,' he told Ackerley, some months after their first meeting. 'The results of his kindness rather disconcerted him, I think, and I am most anxious

that nothing shall get about to vex him.' Not long after this, matters between them took a definite step forward. Forster reported to Sprott that Bob had 'fallen very violently in liking with him', and he began to wonder if he, himself, were not falling in love. He did not really want to, but before long he had done so; and the two, at this time, plighted some kind of troth.

Matters between him and Buckingham being now on a firm footing, Forster relaxed his caution and began to go about with him among his own friends. He introduced him to Florence Barger, who liked him and was soon forming schemes for improving his mind. He also took him to West Hackhurst, where Buckingham, who was a handyman, tactfully exerted himself doing odd jobs. Lily, however, was jealous and took against him. 'How ugly Mr Bucknam is!' she remarked; to which Forster replied, hypocritically 'Well *I* think so.' She never really got to like Buckingham or learned to pronounce his name, persisting to the end in calling him 'Bucknam'.

Forster wondered sometimes if he were not now tending to show Bob off, like a trophy. Also, and conversely, he noted 'When one takes someone one loves to pay a call, one assumes that a great impression will be made for good or bad. It is surprising to learn from a fourth party that his visit was scarcely noticed.'¹ When Buckingham had a few days' leave in the early summer, they hired a car and went for a brief tour in the West Country, calling on their way on Lytton Strachey and Carrington. Carrington, who greatly liked Forster – half wishing, indeed that she could be his *confidante* – observed Buckingham with all the attention Forster could have wished, writing to Sebastian Sprott:

Morgan, & Bob (?) have just left me. They dropt in about 3 o'ck – Then went off across the Downs to see Monkey-wife-author,² found him out so came back here to tea – I found Policeman Bob very charming and attractive to look at, & 'easy to get on with', as they say. I couldn't quite remember past history, but I think I do . . . He told me he looked up your name in the 3 swans, where they had lunch. – Morgan seemed very happy. He had hired a very old Essex motor car & was going for a tour in the West with his sweetie. But *why not* buy a new car, & make Bob the chauffeur sez I to myself after they had been trying to start up the old thing

¹ Commonplace Book, p. 97.

² John Collier, author of the novel *His Monkey Wife* (1930).

for 20 mins in a piercing cold wind in the drive, & Boy Bob only in a thin mackintosh.

I suppose the love of the Policeman is too much for Morgan. – Query? Why don't females have affairs with female policewomen

Forster was now confident that he had found a lasting relationship; and one wonders what sort of relationship it actually was – that is to say, how much, in fact, it was a physical one. Strangely enough, it is not easy to decide. Carrington, and most of Forster's other friends, assumed, of course, that the two went to bed together, but against this there is a curious piece of evidence. During the 1960s Forster, being then in hospital and believing himself to be dying, spoke to Buckingham about his physical passion for him, and Bob was, or so he said, greatly upset: according to him, it was the first he had known of Forster's real feelings, even the first time he had known Forster was homosexual. By this time there were difficulties between them, so it could well be that he was lying – to others or to himself. And certainly, considering Forster's circle, and the knowledge of life acquired by a London policeman, it does seem incredible that Bob should not have known Forster was homosexual. But that they were never – anyway in Buckingham's view – 'lovers' in the physical sense is quite conceivable. Forster was by now middle-aged, and less troubled by physical desire. He would have derived intense pleasure – physical pleasure – from Bob's presence. And Bob, who was an affectionate man, would have given him embraces; no doubt on holidays they would have sometimes shared a bed. It could be that Forster, having fallen profoundly in love, decided not to risk wrecking things by demanding more. I would guess myself that, in early days, there was somewhat more to it than this, but of a kind easily forgotten by Buckingham in later years. The nearest thing to evidence that has survived is a letter from Forster to Sprott (16 July 1931):

. . . I'm quite sure that his [Buckingham's] feeling for me is something he has never had before. It's a spiritual feeling which has extended to my physique – pardon, cher maitre, such nomenclature; I desire to convey that it's something he calls MORGAN he's got hold of, so that my lack of youth and presence which in other relationships might hinder or depress me, are here no disadvantage, in fact the reverse.

Whatever their relationship, there was one major threat to it. Buckingham, when he first met Forster, had just broken with a girl-

friend, but since then he had found another, a hospital nurse named May Hockey, and it seemed that they might be marrying soon. It was a prospect that had to be faced, and Forster faced it as gracefully as he could, even lending Bob a key to his flat so that he could meet May there. As for meeting May himself, his heart sank at the prospect. 'I wish there wasn't this horrid nurse – I assume she's horrid,'¹ he told Reid (17 July 1931). 'At present she is longing to meet me, but one knows what that means and how it ends.' The encounter eventually took place, and he was forced to admit that May was probably 'a good sort' and nice-looking 'But *oh* the voice!' he told Sprott. 'Oh the proprietary screams at Bob!' His own feelings were every bit as proprietary. By facing the likelihood of their marriage he did not mean renouncing any of his rights in Bob, either over his affections or his time. May, as it turned out, made no difficulties over this, indeed she showed herself full of good will. Thus for a year or so the three arranged their lives very amicably, and in 1932 Forster, in his *Commonplace Book*, addressed a message to posterity.

Happiness

I have been happy for two years.

It mayn't be over yet, but I want to write it down before it gets spoiled by pain – which is the chief thing pain can do in the inside life spoil the lovely things that had got in there first

Happiness can come in one's natural growth and not queerly, as religious people think. From 51 to 53 I have been happy, and would like to remind others that their turn can come too It is the only message worth giving.

¹ There was irony in her being a nurse, considering his and his mother's prejudices about nurses. (See Vol. 1, p. 83.)

7 'Saving Civilization'

By this time Forster had come to be in demand as a broadcaster. His connection with the B.B.C. went back to 1928, when he had delivered a talk on 'Railway Bridges', and since then, through his friendship with Joe Ackerley, he had exercised some-behind-the-scenes influence in the Talks Department.¹ He had formed a strong sense of the importance of the B.B.C., both for good and for evil. It had struck him how Dickinson, in his old age, had become a successful broadcaster, beginning to win the sort of following he had failed of as a writer. And he sensed, too, the various pressures on the B.B.C., some of them sinister, and suspected the Government of wanting to exploit it for its own ends.

Now during 1931, he received an invitation to give a regular fortnightly series of broadcast book-reviews. The year was one of some significance in the B.B.C.'s history. When the B.B.C. had first received its charter, in 1927, it had been forbidden to broadcast discussions on controversial topics, only securing the right after some tough fighting by its Director-General Sir John Reith. Reith, having won his battle, had appointed an energetic Talks Director, Hilda Matheson, and she had brought various prominent controversialists to the microphone. They had, however – to Reith's discomfort – been mainly of a leftish tinge: and by 1931, a year of national crisis and 'red scares', the B.B.C. was under attack from all sides, but

¹ Lionel Fielden, a Talks producer at this time, wrote: 'I remember best the trinity of E. M. Forster, Desmond MacCarthy and H. G. Wells, who gave us freely of their time and wise counsels, and would sit round our gas fires at Savoy Hill, talking of the problems and possibilities of broadcasting' (*The Natural Bent*, 1960, p. 105).

especially from the right, and was in danger of forfeiting its independence.

There occurred, for instance, a ludicrous episode when a radio play about General Nobile's Polar expedition was withdrawn at the last moment, under government pressure, for no better reason than that it featured a rescue by a *Russian* icebreaker. Forster, who had not yet begun his book-talks, was provoked by this incident to write an article, 'The Freedom of the B.B.C.', for the *New Statesman* (4 April 1931). Till recently, he argued in it, attacks on the B.B.C. had been harmless, a matter of old ladies removing their earphones and shouting 'Rubbish' into them, under the impression that their words were transmitted back to the B.B.C., or of old gentlemen scrawling postcards saying 'Is this music? If so, I or it are mad.' Now, however, the attacks were on new lines: 'The aim is suppression. When suppression has been achieved, control may be attempted, but suppression is the immediate objective.' The B.B.C. – by which he meant Sir John Reith – took the line of dignity: it was too grand to take notice of press attacks. 'Unfortunately its dignity is only superficial. It does yield to criticism, and to bad criticism, and it yields in advance – the most pernicious of surrenders.'

Reith by now was at war with Hilda Matheson, his Talks Director. He would send her sharp little notes, suggesting that such-and-such a speaker was 'subversive' or eccentric or an anarchist. He also tried to prevent Harold Nicolson, a friend of Hilda Matheson and one of her star broadcasters, from referring to Joyce's *Ulysses* in his book-talks. Thus, before Forster began his own book-talks, Reith summoned him to Savoy Hill to explain his policy and certain 'formulae'. It was stiff little interview, and after it Reith wrote (1 October 1931) reaffirming his standpoint.

We cannot clearly define the 'limitations' under which a broadcast critic should work. I felt that you both understood and agreed with our sense of responsibility in the control of this great influence. That, and the character of the audience more or less determine what should be said. I think you agreed with me that in talking to such an audience – all ages, all grades of intelligence, and perhaps particularly all standards of stability – one has to be careful not to disrupt and leave disruption. The works of certain writers such as those whom we happened to mention may be of interest, and may even be of importance, but with many people they are not, in these days especially, helpful. And I am not sure

that being helpful, in a comprehensive sense of the term, is not a fairly good criterion

The 'unhelpful' writers whom he hoped Forster would not mention were Aldous Huxley and Bertrand Russell. Forster replied diplomatically, saying that he was glad that Reith's 'formulae' were not to be applied rigidly, for otherwise 'I could not conscientiously apply for the post'

Soon afterwards Reith discontinued Harold Nicolson's contract, and, partly as a result of this, Hilda Matheson resigned. Nicolson then wrote a vituperative article in the *Spectator*, describing the B.B.C.'s board of governors as 'a pack of ninnies . . . too prone to listen to letters from angry clergymen', and Forster wrote in his support, saying that the reason why Hilda Matheson had resigned must be because the B.B.C. was too cautious. 'A timid B.B.C. is an appalling prospect,' he said, 'because, though timid, it will always be influential, and it will confirm thousands of us in our congenial habit of avoiding unwelcome truths.'

No reprisals followed from his intervention, and it was arranged that he should begin his book-talks in October 1932, alternating week by week with G. K. Chesterton. He also, in the preceding February, broadcast a dialogue with Bob Buckingham, in a series called 'Conversations in the Train'. In this, the two meet as strangers on a train. There is a little *contretemps*, when Forster tries to throw Buckingham's suitcase out of the window, under the impression that another traveller has left it. As a result, they fall into conversation, and, discovering each other's occupation, they quarrel amicably about the Police versus the Public. Buckingham demolishes various misconceptions about the police – that they are ignorant flat-foots, that they get promotion solely by making arrests, and so on. He describes the new educational system for policemen, at which Forster, asks: 'This excellent education they give you, this Peel House, and all the rest of it: does it make you human?' Buckingham answers, 'I should hope not. . . . The public doesn't want us to be human beings, with human faults. It wants us to be a machine in which it can rely – a machine that will stop traffic for it when it wants, and pick it up when it faints and show it the way when it is an old lady who's lost and guard its house when it's got one. . . .' Growing heated, he continues: 'If I may say so, isn't it rather a pity to keep on grumbling against the

Police and everything the way you do? You don't help us nor yourself either.' At this Forster rounds on him:

F. It is not a pity and I shall continue to grumble. And I'll tell you why. This bickering ungenerous attitude of the general public whom I represent; this endless uninformed ungracious criticism of the Police and their ways; I suggest to you it's much more valuable than you think. It keeps you up to the mark –

B Well I'm blessed

F.—Our mark, not yours. It counteracts your officialism. It helps you to be human beings and at the bottom of your hearts you should be grateful for it.

* * *

Forster's commitment to the P.E.N. had never been more than temperate. In 1930 he had been invited for the third time to be president of the Young P.E.N. but had refused, saying 'All institutions benefit by a change of officials (even when the officials do as little as I have done!)' Then, early in the following year he had a fracas with the P.E.N. – rather a characteristic one. Two years previously a scheme had been concerted between the P.E.N. centres to erect a memorial to Rupert Brooke, on the island of Skyros. It was to be in the form of a bronze, commissioned for the purpose from a Greek sculptor, and Forster had made a small subscription towards the cost. The monument was to be unveiled in April 1931, and Forster was duly sent a circular about the ceremony; however, with it there was enclosed a brochure from a travel agency, advertising a cruise to Skyros for Rupert Brooke admirers. Forster was scandalized by this advertisement, which seemed to him the most vulgar piece of commercialism. He returned it to the P.E.N. Secretary, Hermon Ould, with a severe little note, saying that the manner and the matter of it were 'equally deplorable', and announcing his resignation from the P.E.N. Ould, somewhat bewildered, replied denying any personal responsibility for the cruise and asking Forster to make it clearer 'why you think the P.E.N. deserves your resignation': Forster, however, was not to be shifted. Nor was he appeased by a letter from Galsworthy, who wrote 'Honestly I don't think there's often been an association that has kept itself clearer from commercial notions.' The break with the P.E.N. was not, even at the time, very drastic, for when, next year, he visited Romania, the P.E.N. gave a dinner

in his honour in Bucharest. (It left him feeling slightly dashed, since none of those present had actually read, or even, it seemed, heard of his novels.) All the same he never forgot the Skyros cruise. He would say that, after it, he had never taken the P.E.N. very seriously. In later years, his tone about it was indulgent but dismissive. 'A very harmless club . . . never very brilliant or commanding . . . When you heard of a person who belonged, you thought that was the sort of thing he *would* do.'¹

The Romanian visit was his first taste of the Balkans. He went as the guest of an old friend from Weybridge days, Sir Alec Randall, now First Secretary at the embassy at Bucharest, Randall was an enterprising host.² Forster was taken on 'intensely romantic' expeditions in the sub-Carpathians, lunching in the woods upon trout, and sheep's cheese packed in pine-bark, and descending the slopes in a brakeless railway timber-truck. He wrote dithyrambically to Ackerley of 'The scenery, the gorgeous rough costumes, the peasants and workmen sprawling in the brilliant sun, the wolves bears and boars lurking to pounce upon them from the beeches birches larches and spruces and to dapple with their rich gore their couches of pansies and thyme.' He also made the discovery of Sibiu, an ancient fortress-town in Transylvania, still half German-speaking, and very curious and charming in its architecture – its huseroofs being pierced with dormers like elongated eyes. It prompted an article, 'The Eyes of Sibiu',³ in which he played with the fancy that its inhabitants were the children led through the mountain by the Pied Piper. From Rumania he travelled on alone to Cracow, and this too caught his fancy. 'What other town,' he wrote later, 'has threaded a golden crown on the spire of its church, or has installed a trumpeter to play every hour and to end his tune with a gasp because, centuries ago, a trumpeter was shot through the throat by the Mongols.'⁴ He found it altogether a strange place and witnessed there a game of chess played with human pieces.

He had come to Cracow with an introduction to an English-

¹ Conversation with the author in 1969.

² See Sir Alec Randall's memoir 'Forster in Rumania', in *Aspects of E. M. Forster*, ed. O. Stallybrass (1969).

³ *Spectator*, 25 June 1932.

⁴ 'Chess at Cracow'; *Time and Tide*, 13 August 1932, reprinted in *Abinger Harvest*.

speaking Polish lady, Mrs Myslakowska. She proved to be young, large and beautiful, 'a perfect Juno of a woman', and he was entertained by her several times at her flat. She was a translator, and the idea soon occurred to them that she might translate his novels.¹ Before long she became confiding, and Forster heard about her troubles with her husband, who had recently threatened her with a revolver. She was longing for a divorce; and on Forster's return to England, he received a letter from Mrs Myslakowska containing – more or less – a proposal of marriage. Forster made what reply he could, and Lily said he seemed to have left the Continent only just in time. However, a few weeks later, Mrs Myslakowska appeared in England in person. Forster was by now somewhat nervous, but he invited her to West Hackhurst; and during a walk in his wood, she vigorously repeated the marriage-proposal – also alarming him by suggesting they lie down under the trees. He found himself in an awkward situation; and it was made worse by the fact that Lily had taken a great fancy to their visitor. She sang her praises so loudly, Forster half suspected she wanted to marry him off.

In the event he extricated himself from the affair with fair grace, even retaining the friendship of Mrs Myslakowska. But it had added a grain or two to his misogyny. During the same year he made a long entry on Women in his *Commonplace Book*.

... One can run away from women, turn them out, or give in to them. No fourth course.

Men sometimes want to be without women. Ah why is the converse not equally true? ('Yes – it is – don't you be so conceited' – even as I write the above I hear the insincere unfriendly shriek.) Destruction of Club Life – women will not rest till it is complete ...

Indeed this note need never end. I must set against it the occasional beauty of their voices in singing. The male, even at his best, has a fruity complacency. A woman can forget herself here.

* * *

Since 1931 Lowes Dickinson's life had been in decline. He was now over seventy and was suffering from prostate trouble, and he told Forster he wondered how much longer he wanted to cling on to life. In July 1932 he had to go into hospital for major surgery. He kept the fact a secret from his sisters but gave Forster letters to deliver in the

¹ In 1938 she published a translation into Polish of *A Passage to India*.

case of his death; and a few days after the operation he died. It was a momentous event for Forster, who still felt strong emotions of discipleship. 'Who will not miss him?' he wrote to Darling (24 August 1932). 'Mrs Newman his bedmaker said "He was the best man who ever lived," and I would write that on his tomb, if he needed one.' Dickinson had appointed Forster his literary executor; and on the strength of this, the Dickinson sisters¹ invited him to write their brother's biography. It seemed to him a fitting idea, indeed in a way a duty, and he agreed, setting to work within a few months.

The experience of reading early letters and of reviving his own now far-off Cambridge youth seemed at first, he told a friend, 'like opening a tomb'. He guessed that his younger friends, like Ackerley and Bob Buckingham, would find his book old-fashioned, but, so he told Buckingham, he did not want 'to be up-to-date at someone else's expense'. The problem about old-fashionedness was preoccupying him just then, and he wrote words about Dickinson that applied partly to himself:

One may almost say of him that he held nineteenth-century opinions in a twentieth-century way . . . he felt the questions of personal immortality and the existence of God to be so important he never got fussed over them . . . One can contrast him, here, with another academic speculator, Henry Sidgwick. Sidgwick wanted to believe in God, and his inability to do so caused him a constant strain. Dickinson, equally conscientious, was somehow freer and less glum. It would never have occurred to him as it did to Sidgwick to compose his own funeral service. As soon as it came to the question of his own death, his own fate, he turned easy and modern . . .²

Dickinson's letters were not only illegible but mostly very dull, and as he laboured through them, he told Ackerley, he imagined he heard Dickinson's voice sighing: 'Really my dear Morgan, that you should have to do this.' More and more, as he progressed, he had the illusion of Dickinson speaking to him in person. Dickinson had left an autobiography in manuscript, and Forster used it as a framework for his own book, omitting however, the very frank sexual confessions which, with his encouragement, Dickinson had written in his last years. It set his mind running on his own future biographer. 'I get

¹ i.e. May and Hester, Janet having died in 1924.

² *Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson* (1934), chapter 10.

more absorbed in the book on Goldie,' he told Joe Ackerley (10 January 1933). 'I wish I could get one written about me after I die, but I should want every thing told, everything, and there's so far so little. Goldie, because one's condemned to omissions, looms larger.'

* * *

That 'easiness' and 'modernity' Forster had defined in Dickinson, he possessed himself in a larger share, and they did duty in place of more conscious literary 'modernism'. As a result of the war, there had been a vogue for hatred of old men, every evil in the world being blamed on the old, but, by some exception, Forster had escaped and was regarded by the young as an 'old man' deserving of respect and love. In fact, despite his only half-welcoming attitude towards the literary *avant-garde*, he had become an influence on young writers. There is a passage in Christopher Isherwood's autobiography *Lions and Shadows* in which a Cambridge friend of his called 'Chalmers' (in real life, Edward Upward) announces the discovery of Forster's modernity. The year is 1926, and 'Chalmers' and Isherwood are collaborating on a novel. Chalmers writes.

I saw it all suddenly while I was reading *Howards End* . . . Forster's the only one who understands what the modern novel ought to be . . . Our frightful mistake was that we believed in tragedy: the point is, tragedy's quite impossible nowadays . . . We ought to aim at being essentially comic writers . . . The whole of Forster's technique is based on the tea-table: instead of trying to screw all his scenes up to the highest possible pitch, he tones them down until they sound like mothers'-meeting gossip . . . In fact, there's actually *less* emphasis laid on the big scenes than on the unimportant ones: that's what's so utterly terrific. It's the completely new kind of accentuation – like a person talking a different language . . .

The phrase 'tea-tabling' got about and became current among critics as the way of defining Forster's fictional method.

Isherwood himself had felt Forster's influence. He had written his first novel *All the Conspirators* in 1926, and in revising it during the following year he gave it the 'tea-tabling' treatment. Looking back later on this period he saw himself as influenced both by Forster's 'rejection of the humbug that still predominated in English society', and by the casual easy tone of his novels. He wrote: 'One of the most revolutionary (opening) sentences to a working novelist was "One

may as well begin with Helen's letters''.¹ For him, as for Upward, Forster represented a kind of modernity, and the two were greatly excited by Forster's account of Gide's *Les Faux-monnayeurs* in *Aspects of the Novel* – finding the actual novel, when they read it, rather an anti-climax.

* * *

The year of Dickinson's death was, as it happened, one in which Forster formed friendships with several of the younger novelists. It was at this time, for instance, that he got to know William Plomer. Plomer had made his name a few years before with his first novel, *Turbott Wolfe*, an impassioned tract about black-white relations in South Africa, written while he was still a very young man and working as a trader and farmer in Zululand. It had caused much scandal in South Africa, and on the strength of its success he had joined Roy Campbell in launching a literary magazine; then in 1927, on a whim, he had gone to Japan for two years, scraping a living there by teaching, and producing a volume of short stories on Japanese themes. Since that time he had been in London, living with a painter friend named Anthony Butts. Forster had known him casually through the Woolfs, who had published *Turbott Wolfe*, and also through Joe Ackerley, who was a close friend of Plomer's; and now, rather suddenly, the two became intimate.

Plomer was an ironic, rather secretive and mystery-loving man, with a collector's passion for oddities – for suburban house-names, public statues and human eccentrics. In manner he was precise and sedate, with a teasing and foxy aplomb. It was a manner at odds with his life, which at this time was almost as frenetic a homosexual chase as Joe Ackerley's. Forster told Sprott that he had only gained Plomer's friendship because he happened to catch him in an 'unguarded moment'. There was in fact some split in him between irony and feeling, for he was at heart deeply sentimental – indeed, his friends said, he allowed sentiment to destroy his life. Like most of his circle he was an admirer of Forster's work, and as he got to know Forster he conceived a strong respect and amused affection for him as a man. He once said to Virginia Woolf: 'I not only like him very much, I esteem him.' (The remark made her laugh. 'That's a most extraordinary word,' she said.) During the early days of their friend-

¹ First words of *Howards End*.

ship, Forster invited him to tea to meet Somerset Maugham and Herbert Read. The occasion went disastrously, Read becoming very pugnacious towards Maugham, referring to 'Contemptible people who write for money, like you.' When the party had dispersed, Forster said reproachfully to Plomer: 'Well, I did think you would have intervened'; to which Plomer replied, sincerely, that a young man like himself could hardly have ventured to.

Plomer was a friend of Christopher Isherwood, at this period living in Berlin, and persuaded Forster to read Isherwood's recently-published novel *The Memorial*. It impressed him enough for him to want to meet the author, and, on one of Isherwood's visits to London, in September 1932, Plomer brought him along to meet Forster. Isherwood was excited and awed and adopted the attitude of a disciple. ('Christopher made a good disciple,' he wrote of himself later;¹ 'like most arrogant people he loved to bow down unconditionally from time to time.') They talked, among other things, of T. E. Lawrence, and, at parting, Forster lent Isherwood his illustrated copy of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. The two began to correspond, and in a letter written soon after their first meeting Isherwood told Forster he was writing 'an indecent bumptious stupid sort of novel about Berlin', which he feared Forster would not like. 'It's strange, I long to do very moving Dickensy scenes with tears, and when it comes to the point I dry up like a stone and write something venomous. It's as if I had some nasty green poison in my system.'

At much the same period, Forster also made the acquaintance of 'John Hampson' – in real life, John Simpson – the author of a much-praised though now forgotten novel of provincial life, *Saturday Night at the Greyhound*. Simpson, who was now in his late thirties, lived with a family named Wilson, near Birmingham. He was tiny, and in appearance rather grotesque, with a cow-lick and a Hapsburg chin and dressing from head to foot in brown. (He had a mania for the colour brown, writing in brown ink on nearly-brown paper.) The Wilsons employed Simpson as nurse to Mrs Wilson's idiot brother, Ronald. Before taking this post he had worked in hotel kitchens and had supported himself for a time as a book-thief – though, as he said, 'only taking the best books'. Forster met him through the Woolfs, who had published his novel, and took to him greatly, considering

¹ In *Christopher and his Kind* (1976).

him a most admirable and saint-like character. He soon became a frequent visitor to him and the Wilsons, growing quite fond of the idiot, Ronald, a good-humoured giant who could not talk but would imitate cows mooing and horses neighing. Forster said that every family should have an idiot.

* * *

So far as his London life was concerned, his closest companion was still Joe Ackerley. He was very fond of Ackerley, perpetually amused by him, and had no secrets from him. Ackerley had at last, in a mood of desperation, completed a book, *Hindoo Holiday*, based on his experiences at Chhatarpur. It received a glowing press, Evelyn Waugh writing of it in the *Spectator* (16 April 1932) that it was 'difficult to control one's enthusiasm and praise it temperately'. It did his reputation in the B.B.C. much good, with the effect that a year or two later he would be appointed literary editor of the *Listener*.

To Forster's relief, Ackerley was for the moment seeing less of Harry Daley. In fact, the Hammersmith circle was breaking up, and there had begun a general exodus of Forster's friends to Maida Vale: Plomer, Ackerley and Leo Charlton and Tom Whichelo all moved there during the autumn of 1933, and they were joined by Stephen Spender and, briefly, by Auden. Jokes began to be made about the 'Maida Vale School' of writers, and Virginia Woolf decided to name them 'The Lilies of the Valley'.

For some years, Forster had seen little of Siegfried Sassoon. For one thing, Sassoon was not often in London, having bought himself a large mansion, Heytesbury House, in Wiltshire. For another, he was growing prickly and reclusive, inclined to cut old friends in the street and to break appointments. There was an occasion during the mid-1920s when he invited Forster to tea in his London flat and not only was he not there to receive Forster, but the rock cakes provided for his tea were stale. The cakes were the sort of detail Forster's mind fastened on, and not long after this he delivered Sassoon a homily (20 March 1927):

I enjoyed seeing you the other day, and as I probably shan't see you again for 18 months am moved to write you a line. I think your anti-social and self-centred life has a good deal to say for it if you will face its consequences, and not hanker after the best of two worlds. You are full of illusions and they are worrying you and

perhaps stopping your work. You think you want people to come and see you, then you funk their arrival and go out and don't even provide rock cakes that are fresh for their tea. I know you're different from the majority and this isn't a scold – only a tentative tip.

Yours to a street corner,
E.M.F.

Sassoon swallowed the reproof, and the two continued to correspond, intermittently but affectionately, and Forster had once or twice been to stay at Heytesbury. Thus it was with some amazement that in *The Times* for 6 November 1933, he read the announcement of Sassoon's marriage. With amazement and annoyance, for the news puzzled him, and he was hurt to have had to learn it from a newspaper, and on impulse he wrote to Sassoon what he described as 'a line of affection and good wishes and (in a sense) of farewell'. Sassoon, taking this more literally than it was meant, replied anxiously, and at this Forster wrote again (8 November 1933):

Have just had your affectionate letter. I don't think you quite understood mine but you saw it too was affectionate which is what matters. I didn't suppose you had acted other than rightly, and I shan't seek T.E.'s or anyone else's opinion on her, and I shall like to meet her. But Siegfried you mustn't expect me at my age to take on new intimacies. I am wonderfully pliable but I am nearly 55. You are entwined with my past and with my future so far as I can connect it with that past.

To ask what doctors might call 'a certain question', and which I shouldn't ask unless I was very fond of you. – Have you had an emotional and physical overturn? Your news, though I accept it as good news, startles me. (Not a question that has to be answered.)

Then as to that rock bun, it never stuck in my throat, and it has only made me laugh . . .

There was much gossip in Bloomsbury about the news, and Virginia Woolf was ribald about the 'great sorrow' in Maida Vale over Sassoon's 'defection'.¹ Forster, before long, accepted an invitation to stay with Sassoon and his wife Hester,² and was, in the event, greatly taken with Hester. He told Plomer (March 1935) that he was 'half in love with her – she is so intelligent, simple and gentle.'

* * *

Dickinson's death had been memorable for Forster in another way

¹ Letter from Virginia Woolf to Quentin Bell, 21 December 1933.

² Hester Gatty.

than the obvious one, for at the memorial service in King's Bob Buckingham had told him that he and May Hockey were to get married.¹ Forster received the news quietly, but it hit him hard, and during the next few days he felt, he told Sprott, as if 'hourly rolled upon a shingle beach'. The wedding took place in August at a registry office – Forster, and one of Buckingham's fellow-policemen, acting as witnesses; he refused to stay for the celebration and went back to his flat in gloom. The next few months in his life were bitter for him. The Buckinghams had taken a flat in Shepherd's Bush, and he helped them a little with money, wondering for an instant whether he should, as it were, bargain for Bob's time. All depended, for his peace of mind, on how often he could still get Bob alone; and since Bob, preoccupied with May, was also working for his sergeant's examination, he became unreliable about appointments. It was what Forster had dreaded, and he would have flares of misogyny and would rail against May to friends: 'The woman is domineering, sly and *knowing*.' As before, at moments of extreme stress, he suffered hysterical rages, when he would throw himself against the furniture. He wrote about them to Sprott (4 October 1932), asking him, in his capacity as psychologist, for a diagnosis or cure. He described them cynically:

Attacks take the form of sudden yelps, contortions, pretence fainting-fits, and the hitting of parts of my body that don't hurt against objects in the room that aren't valuable, and always the feeling that I could have 'helped' it, indeed I often have helped it . . . I don't like calling them attacks, but regard them as part of my character

He began to feel that he must make a break with Bob, or perhaps go abroad to escape. Even at this time, he saw Bob often for brief meetings, at the Section House or in Brunswick Square. Bob's line was 'We've got to go without pleasure for a bit'; and Forster had to acknowledge that, to an onlooker, it would seem Bob was acting very responsibly. Eventually, in December, he plucked up courage to pay the Buckinghams a visit. It went not too uncomfortably. The worst was now over, from his point of view, and soon he began to frequent their flat and was involving himself in their joint life.

Bob Buckingham now found himself a prize disputed between two

¹ Much of the information in the present chapter comes from May Buckingham and the late Robert Buckingham.

determined claimants. The great issue was his leisure-time. Forster felt he had a claim on it, or at any rate he meant to assert one. It was a silent fight between him and May, and to a good extent he was the winner, making Bob give him his half-days-off and other odd hours during the week. In a way he had the upper hand, for Bob was fascinated by him, fond of him, flattered by the attachment and excited by the *entrée* into a new kind of life. It made May feel neglected and jealous, also a little bewildered, but she kept her feelings to herself. She behaved, in fact, with great staunchness and shrewdness, refusing to listen when Harry Daley told her that Forster was breaking up her marriage. She realized the danger of interfering and reflected that maybe it was better than a husband who ran after other women. Moreover, even at this stage, she liked Forster and could half understand Bob's infatuation. Very occasionally, she would rebel, usually over Bob's free time, and then Forster and she would quarrel. He fought her toughly – even, sometimes, asking her to leave the room, in her own house, so that he might talk privately with Bob.

As for Bob Buckingham himself, he was both flattered and confused by the duel fought over him. His life was exciting when he did not scrutinize it closely, but when he paused to examine it, he began to feel bewildered – wondering about his class-situation, and about his position in Forster's circle. It was pleasant, but faintly unreal, to be on Christian-names terms with Siegfried Sassoon and T. E. Lawrence; it was nice, but also galling, to be an object of interest and philanthropy and to be encouraged to paint and to learn German – though indeed he enjoyed painting and thought he had a talent for it. He was a sanguine and unreflective man and was enjoying a happy marriage, so he did not often brood on the situation, but every now and then he would feel lost, and as if he were only at home in his rowing-club. He managed to escape quite often to the club, winning sundry cups for rowing and causing Joe Ackerley, on Forster's behalf, to reproach him for neglecting his friends.

For all this, he held his own in his friendship with Forster. He was himself fairly left-wing, once having been active in the Unemployed Workers Association, and he would attack Forster over class-attitudes. Once he lectured Forster for talking too much about money, in an 'amusing' way. The criticism went home. 'It is true, but how to cure myself at 55?' Forster noted in his Commonplace Book:

The ugly habit has crept on me I bring myself to the front by saying jokingly that I am rich, poor, have made good terms in America, paid a lot at a restaurant, and a man who has had real worries over money rebukes me. 'A thing to use if one's got it' – I have always preached that, yet I am letting it use me, and take hold of me where I feel safest, through my sense of humour

Through Siegfried Sassoon they had got to know Stephen Tennant, a nephew of Margot Asquith and a well-known aesthete of the period. They would go to stay weekends with him in his house, Wilsford Manor, near Salisbury Tennant made a cult of things marine; his vast mock-Tudor baronial hall was hung with lobster-pots and fishing-nets, and Forster and Buckingham would be given the Sailor Suite, which was furnished with portholes opening on to painted seascapes The two much liked Tennant but, bridging their own class-difference, suspected him of upper-class caprice. (There was an occasion, a few years later, when Bob held forth at dinner about crime and criminal horrors, and, in a fury, Tennant rushed from the room, extinguishing all the candles.) From time to time, Forster would send Tennant a reproof, which he would accept with melancholy grace. He admired Forster extravagantly, considering him a 'mage' and 'a sublime malcontent', and noticing – percipiently – Forster's suppressed love of the exotic. (They would talk about Persian poetry.) He collected Forster's sayings – 'Nothing lasts' (a frequent remark); 'I like fellows who fib'; 'I can't ever hear enough festering superstitions'; and 'One is conscious of traits in oneself that are not very admirable – but one deals with them'. When Tennant praised a passage in one of Forster's novels, he said to him 'That was one of my little swallow-flights into Proust.'¹

* * *

On 21 April 1933 May had a baby; and at a party in Brunswick Square the next day, Forster, Buckingham, Joe Ackerley and Christopher Isherwood toasted the child's health in champagne. It was a boy and was to be named 'Robert Morgan', and Forster was to be godfather – a fact which excited him, for he had always wanted a son. He now had a further foothold in the Buckingham household, and in June, less than two months after May's confinement, he managed to commandeer Bob for the whole of Bob's annual holidays. They had arranged to borrow Sprott's car and make another tour of

¹ Information given to the author by Stephen Tennant in 1975.

the West country Forster told Sprott [n.d.] 'I have been "watching" him [Buckingham] over this holiday, but he advances blandly towards it, apparently not thinking it will be too long with me or wanting to be with his wife.' Sprott applauded Forster's enterprise, writing (17 August 1933):

What you have to do is to fight against anything that savours of fidelity to his wife. It can't crop up in such old-fashioned dress as 'FIDELITY' – *nous avons changé* . . . – but there is a nice line of fancy dress at its disposal. 'It wouldn't be fair . . .' 'If one builds a home, it's only right that one should stop in it.' 'She is so miserable when I am away.' And so on. Well then you have a nice line in counter-arguments, and among them FREEDOM, which is much thought of by any who want to appear modern.

Joe Ackerley and Sebastian Sprott were, as always, solicitous about Forster's love-life. On first hearing of Forster's happiness with Bob Buckingham, Sprott had written in terms of great devotion:

I've just re-read your letter for the 4th time – you can't think how very glad I am to hear of your happiness. You give so much to me and other people. I believe you are about the only person whose happiness makes me really feel happy – not a mere 'say so'. I have a faint feeling of good will to most people, a feeling of envy towards many, but nothing but strong wishes about you and no envy in an unpleasant sense whatever, nothing but wholehearted pleasure at hearing of your success, and reading that you are *gonflé d'amour*.¹

He and Ackerley were still keen, none the less, to do some friendly pandering for Forster, and though, since the advent of Bob, Forster was less interested in casual affairs, he would every now and then spend an evening with one or other of their *protégés* – guardsmen, window-cleaners, reformed or unreformed burglars or the out-of-work. He grew friendly with several of them, keeping up with them as friends in a desultory way for years. They would sometimes call unannounced, and he would take them out to supper and, if asked, give them a very small loan. He became an expert in cheap restaurants: at any time there was some transport café or fish-and-chip diner which he extolled, to the disadvantage of places like Boulestin's, where, he would say, one ate 'scented muck'. Since these callers were genuine friends of Sprott's or Ackerley's, he felt in no danger. On one

¹ Undated letter, presumably 1931.

occasion he was robbed, but of nothing of great value, and it did not perturb him. On another, in 1934 or thereabouts, an out-of-work acquaintance described to him how he had been enrolled in Mosley's Blackshirts and given a weekly dole by them. Forster felt he must do something about this and reported the details to Beatrice Webb.

Every now and then he would hear from Achille, the sailor he had picked up in Toulon in 1929. Achille wrote very good letters, though usually they included a request for a loan, and sometimes a letter would come from a friend, regretting that Achille was in prison *pour une petite escroquerie* and asking for a few francs, which Forster sent or did not send as his mood inclined. Achille had returned to his home in Forbach, in the Saar, and was working as a waiter there. He kept pressing Forster to come and see him, and in November 1934, being *en route* for the Maurons, Forster went to spend two days with him. To explain Forster's presence to his friends, Achille passed him off as an uncle in the clothes trade, long domiciled in England – in a small way of business, Achille added, to account for Forster's dowdy appearance. Achille relished the drama of the occasion. He put Forster up in a hotel but made rules, such as that they must never leave the hotel together, or look out of the window, since the restaurant opposite was kept by a cousin. Forster, enjoying himself, reflected that nothing like this had happened to him in his youth

* * *

As for some time, and more keenly now with the menace of fascism, he felt the urge to involve himself in public activities. Bob Buckingham, who thought him too retiring, encouraged him in this. And in the spring of 1934 there presented itself a cause very much suited to him, when the recently-founded National Council for Civil Liberties invited him to become their first president. The Council was the creation of Ronald Kidd (1889–1942), a freelance journalist of crusading tendencies, much influenced in his youth by Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis. The immediate *raison d'être* of the Council had been the Hunger Marches. At the last appearance of the hunger marchers in London it had been widely rumoured that the police had used foul means in handling them, employing *agents provocateurs* and the like. Kidd had been vocal in the press* on the subject, and had eventually decided that what was needed was an organized body of impartial and reputable observers, to be present at such demonstrations and report illegalities or police misconduct.

Kidd was an earnest and saint-like man, with wide connections among left-wing lawyers and journalists. He and his friends – among them Kingsley Martin and Claud Cockburn – had founded the Council in February 1934, at a meeting in the crypt of St Martin's-in-the-Fields.¹ They had practically no funds, so for a headquarters it was decided to use Kidd's own flat, a cheerless hovel in Dansey Place, off Shaftesbury Avenue. A month or so after their foundation, another hunger march had taken place and Kidd had organized a distinguished corps of observers for the occasion, including Julian Huxley, Vera Brittain, H. G. Wells* and Forster. The newspapers had taken up the story, and as a result the N.C.C.L. had become famous. As Claud Cockburn related: 'People from far and wide who felt themselves spurned by bureaucrats, menaced by tyrannical authorities, or just generally kicked about and done down, came rushing to Dansey Place with such enthusiasm that part of the staircase gave way and people looking for Civil Liberty had to jump.'

The Council's first choice as president had been H. W. Nevinson. Nevinson had declined, on grounds of age and ill-health, and it had been he (most probably) who proposed Forster's name. The declared aims of the N.C.C.L. were entirely Forster's own, and he felt he could hardly refuse the invitation. Some of his friends warned him that the Council was crypto-communist,* but for the moment he did not believe this. And Kidd himself – grave-mannered, single-minded, and imperturbable – impressed Forster. He thought Kidd a genuinely selfless man. 'Very serious and pushful,' was his later phrase for him.

The business of the Council was transacted in an Executive Committee, which met monthly, and a General Purposes Sub-Committee, which met weekly, both being chaired by W. H. Thompson, a genial, brusque and philistine solicitor of the radical left. Forster became a regular attendant at the Executive Committee. He was not, as a rule, very vocal at its meetings, his habit being to listen

¹ There were a dozen or so present at the founding meeting, including Kingsley Martin, Claud Cockburn, Edith Summerskill, Amabel Williams-Ellis, Mrs Haden Guest, Dudley Collard, Geoffrey Bing, David Freeman, Ambrose Applebe, Alun Thomas of the International Labour Defence, Professor George Catlin (Vera Brittain's husband), Professor W. E. Le Gros Clark, Douglas Goldring, and Sylvia Crowther-Smith (later Scaffardi).

carefully and then put his own views in letters to Ronald Kidd.

Shortly after accepting the presidency, Forster invited Kidd for the day to West Hackhurst and, after some hesitation, mentioned that he had a close friend in the police force and asked Kidd if this might prejudice his position as president. Kidd, for whom the enemy was not the police themselves but those who misused them for political purposes, reassured him, and before long Forster was finding Bob Buckingham a useful informant on police behaviour.¹

Within a few weeks of his becoming president the N.C.C.L. became involved in one of its most important campaigns, against the 'Sedition Bill'. The National Government, alarmed at the circulation of Communist journals among the armed forces, had introduced a Bill making it an offence to disseminate, or even to be in possession of, literature 'liable to seduce soldiers or sailors from their duty or allegiance'. In effect, the Bill reintroduced 'general warrants', which had been illegal since the days of Wilkes. There was excitement in the press, and within forty-eight hours of the Bill's publication, the N.C.C.L. circulated an analysis of it, and of its threats to liberty, to every member of the House of Commons. It also, immediately, began to organize protest meetings, first of its own members, then of representatives from various political parties, churches and pacifist organizations. Forster, who was strongly convinced of the evils of the Bill, found himself extremely busy, despatching innumerable canvassing letters and taking part in a deputation to the Attorney-General, Sir Thomas Inskip.

The agitation was kept up all the summer. A mass meeting, to be held in the Central Hall, Westminster, was planned for 18 October, just before the re-opening of Parliament, and Forster ('by pure personal charm', as he reported to John Simpson) secured H. G. Wells, J. B. Priestley, Bishop Barnes and Hannen Swaffer as speakers; he also helped organize a giant petition, to be presented in Parliament by Eleanor Rathbone. Kidd and his friends had meanwhile devised an ingenious tactic, according to which members were to pledge themselves, should the Bill become law, to go to the military establishment at Aldershot and distribute copies of 'seditious' speeches

¹ On 9 September of this year Mosley's Blackshirts and the Anti-fascists held rival rallies in Hyde Park. Bob Buckingham was detailed for duty in the Park, and Forster got him to write a detailed account of events.

made by the present prime minister, Ramsay MacDonald, at the time of the First World War and the General Strike. Forster disliked this 'pledge'. He took advice from Leonard Woolf and others, and from this it appeared to him that the gesture might expose them to prosecution even under existing laws. The matter worried him, for the idea was to make the pledge a test of allegiance to the N.C.C.L.; and eventually, after some heart-searching, he wrote to Kidd (6 October 1934) offering to resign if the pledge were made compulsory. He did not expect his resignation to be accepted, nor was it; and he appeared and spoke, though without taking the chair, at the meeting on 18 October. The star speaker was H. G. Wells. Wells had just returned from the Soviet Union, in a very bad temper, and he insisted on talking not about the Bill but about the suppression of free speech in totalitarian countries. For this he was barracked by some communists in the audience, and Kingsley Martin, who was in the chair, handled the interruptions in a clumsy and schoolmasterly fashion. As a result the few newspapers that covered the meeting reported the whole occasion as a mainly communist demonstration.

Forster, indignant at the press treatment of the meeting, now put to use his position as journalist. In the summer of this year he had been given a regular column in *Time and Tide* (in a series called 'Notes on the Way') and in the issue for 27 October he contributed an editorial, headed 'Still the Sedition Bill', in which he accused the press and the B.B.C. of deliberately suppressing news of the meeting of the 18th. He urged readers to join the N.C.C.L., and to attend an open-air rally against the Bill in Trafalgar Square the next day; also to get into touch with their M.P. 'And,' he said, 'if their M.P. happens to be Ramsay MacDonald, will they not ask him why the General Search Warrant, which he condemned very sarcastically in 1925, is being fastened on us by him in 1934, and where, in 1935, he would find himself if the Bill functioned retrospectively?' He did not appear in Trafalgar Square himself, but he prescribed tactics to Kidd, telling him he hoped speakers had strict orders to stick to the Bill itself and not be drawn into anti-fascist demonstrations. 'Up to the end of the month, the Government and nothing else is our objective, and nothing else should be allowed to intervene'

By now no one even in the Government much liked the Bill, and it had been considerably modified in committee. It did in fact become law in November, and one or two minor prosecutions were brought

under it; but the agitation had for the moment effectively discredited it.* The N.C.C.L. had proved its efficacy, and it began to form branches up and down the country.

* * *

Forster's *Time and Tide* articles had, in his own phrase, given him a 'pulpit', and from now on he was to be much heard and listened to on political and social issues. He had devised a successful poise for these polemics, writing with much verve and witty phrase-making, but managing at the same time, to raise, with honesty and simplicity, questions that were nagging at ordinary readers' minds. They came down to the question, which bothered him much personally: did it really *matter* what the average, intelligent, but powerless citizen felt about war, or rearmament, or fascism, or communism? The answer he gave was: yes, it mattered just a little. And he defined his own feelings and views unpretentiously and with candour. Of communism: 'It would destroy nearly every thing I understand and like, and I want the present economic and social order to continue. If the present order breaks, communism seems the only hopeful alternative.' And was there anything the same citizen could actually do about these issues? Yes, he answered, some very small things. He might at least boycott the Aldershot Tattoo and the Royal Tournament, and all such institutions which glorified war: 'War has moved from chivalry to chemicals. It is time that we left the Royal Gas Tournament and considered the gas.' He might, too, sell any shares he happened to have in firms that would profit from war.

Some people will say that my scruples are groundless, others that they are futile. Others – and they will be the majority who read these notes – will blame me for not acting before. In no case am I in a position to preach. But I do think that another little thing the private individual can do against war is to look through his investment list and make sure he isn't financing it *directly*.¹

His articles gained him a new following, and he received a stream of grateful letters; they also gained him some violent abuse, for instance in a letter to the editor on 23 June 1934:

¹ He sold his own I.C.I. shares at this time and gave the money to anti-war organizations.

Sir. — Mr E. M. Forster in the course of the pathetic disclosures of his terrors and of his despair, says that 'no political creed except communism offers an intelligent man any hope.'

Further on, he commends to our notice a body called the Council for Civil Liberties

It might be dangerous for Mr Forster to imagine the amount of Civil Liberty that he would enjoy in a Communist society, unless there were at hand whole hogsheads of the liberty anodyne to which he turns in emergencies, and in which he particularizes . . .

* * *

That the N.C.C.L. itself was simply a front organization for the Communist party, was a rumour always in the air, and sometimes the rumour grew loud. Forster did all he could to quiet it and made efforts to attract right-wing, as well as genuinely non-party, members. In January 1935 the Council drew up a declaration of principles, and Forster managed, against much opposition, to impose his own non-party sentiments on it. The draft declaration had referred, vaguely, to the threat to civil liberty 'from whatever quarter', but he had this changed to 'the threat from left or right.' He told Kidd (21 January 1935); 'To my mind the fact that "right or left" has been used by the Conservatives ought not to preclude us from using it. — I should have thought indeed that we would gain rather than lose by stealing their thunder.' The other main line he pressed on the Council was that it should not disperse its energies upon European issues, or even on the troubles in Northern Ireland.¹ It was not strong enough, or well-endowed enough, to do so, and should stick to domestic issues. One of the issues he was interested in was the obscene publication laws, a matter much on his mind ever since the *Well of Loneliness* case. In March 1935 James Hanley's novel *Boy*, published four years before, was condemned as obscene at the Manchester Assizes and its publisher fined £400. Forster, who knew Hanley a little,² was greatly indignant and campaigned through the N.C.C.L. for a change in the law.

* * *

¹ His advice over this was not followed. The N.C.C.L. set up a commission of enquiry into abuses of the Special Powers Act (1922) in Northern Ireland, and its report, which came out in 1936, made a considerable stir.

² He had been introduced to Hanley's work by T. E. Lawrence in 1931, greatly admiring his *A Passion Before Death*.

With his prestige, and his concerned but non-party political stance, Forster was an attractive prize for cultural organizations, and in the spring of 1935 he was invited to head the British delegation to an International Congress of Writers in Paris. The Congress, which was dedicated to the 'Defence of Culture', had been planned by a group of French communist writers originally associated with Henri Barbusse. The effective organizer was André Malraux; and it was part of Malraux's scheme for the Congress to exploit the prestige of his friend André Gide, a recent and illustrious convert to communism. The actual occasion of the Congress, or so Malraux explained it to Gide, was that the Soviet Union, being frequently accused of neglecting or stifling culture, wanted a public opportunity for its writers to expound their ideas. The Congress was to be on a large scale. The Russians were sending a strong delegation, headed by Gorki. Among the French speakers, as well as Malraux and Gide, there were to be Benda, Crevel, Louis Aragon, Barbusse and André Breton. Various leading central-European anti-fascists were to attend, including Brecht, Toller, Musil, Capek and Heinrich Mann; and among the English delegation would be Forster, Aldous Huxley, John Strachey, Ralph Fox and Amabel Williams-Ellis.

As the Congress approached, numerous dramas and intrigues developed. Gorki withdrew for 'health reasons', and a hasty invitation had to be sent to Pasternak and Isaac Babel; Ilya Ehrenburg demanded that the invitation be withdrawn from André Breton, on the grounds that Breton had recently physically assaulted him; and René Crevel, who was on the organizing committee, committed suicide. Forster was for the moment ignorant of these developments, but Malraux wrote to him repeatedly about his own speech, asking him to say this and to say that – causing him to reply that if he could not do things his own way he would not speak at all. He told Malraux he was willing to speak on 'The Cultural Heritage' or 'Liberty of Expression in Society', but whichever the subject he would give the same speech. He had persuaded Charles Mauron to keep him company in Paris and to act as his translator, telling him that not much was to be expected from the Congress beyond 'the smaller writers sidling up to the larger ones and the larger ones sliding away.' In fact, despite his irony, he thought of it as an important occasion, and he did what he could to persuade friends and fellow-writers, James Hanley, the Woolfs, J. B. Priestley and John Lehmann and others, to come to

Paris. 'I do beg you to come, if only for a day or two,' he wrote to Virginia Woolf (6 June 1935). 'I don't suppose the conference is of any use – things have gone too far. But I have no doubt as to the importance of people like ourselves *inside* the conference. We do represent the last utterances of the civilized.'

The five-day Congress opened at the Palais de la Mutualité on 21 June, in sweltering heat. There were some 2,000 in the audience, and many more listening to speeches over the loudspeaker system in adjoining halls and bars; everywhere there were reporters, photographers and cartoonists, and there was a continual coming-and-going in an underground headquarters, where the confidential business of the Congress was transacted. Forster had travelled to Paris with James Hanley and was staying at a hotel with Charles Mauron. He spoke early on the first day of the Congress, entitling his speech 'Liberty in England'. English freedom, he said, was race-bound and class-bound; it meant freedom for Englishmen, not for Indians and Africans, and freedom for the well-off, not for the down-and-out for whom it 'did not signify a plate of fish and chips.' Nevertheless, he said, he believed in liberty, and he thought that the type that had developed in Great Britain might still be useful, both to the British and to the world. As for his politics, the audience would have guessed he was not a fascist ('Fascism does evil that evil may come'), and it might have guessed that he was not a Communist either – 'though perhaps I might be one if I was a younger and a braver man, for in Communism I can see hope. It does many things which I think evil, but I know that it intends good.' For Britain, he said, the danger, except in the case of war, was not really from fascism, but from something more insidious: 'Fabio-fascism.' Fabio-fascism was the dictator-spirit 'working quietly away behind the façade of constitutional forms, passing a little law (like the Sedition Act) here, endorsing a departmental tyranny there, emphasizing the national need of secrecy everywhere, and whispering and cooing the so-called "news" every evening over the wireless, until opposition is tamed and gulled.' As an example, he described the workings of the Obscene Publications laws and related the story of the James Hanley prosecution.

He spoke, he said, only for himself, and not for the rest of the English delegation:

My colleagues probably agree with my account of the situation in our country, but they may disagree with my old-fashioned

attitude over it, and may feel that it is a waste of time to talk about freedom and tradition when the economic structure of society is unsatisfactory. They may say that if there is another war writers of the individualistic and liberalizing type, like myself and Mr Aldous Huxley, will be swept away. I am sure that we shall be swept away, and I think furthermore that there may be another war. It seems to me that if nations keep on amassing armaments, they can no more help discharging their filth than an animal, which keeps on eating, can stop from excreting. This being so, my job, and the job of those who feel with me, is an interim job. We have just to go on tinkering as well as we can with our old tools, until the crash comes. When the crash comes, nothing is any good. After it – if there is an after – the task of civilization will be carried on by people whose training has been different from my own.

The speech, with its Englishness and gentleness, mystified and exasperated his young and mainly communist audience. (Though indeed, since he refused, or had not learnt, to use the microphone, they heard very little of it, and had mainly to depend on Charles Mauron's translation.) The American novelist, Katherine Anne Porter, was in the audience, and – though she was an ardent admirer of Forster – she recalled it as a dispiriting episode:

I think it was just after André Malraux – then as dogmatic in communism as he is now in some other faith – had leaped to the microphone barking like a fox to halt the applause for Julien Benda's speech, that a little slender man with a large forehead and a shy chin rose, was introduced and began to read his paper carefully prepared for this occasion. He paid no attention to the microphone, but wove back and forth, and from side to side, gently, and every time his face passed the mouthpiece I caught a high-voiced syllable or two, never a whole word, only a thin recurring sound like the wind down a chimney as Mr Forster's pleasant good countenance advanced and retreated and returned. Then, surprisingly, once he came to a moment's pause before the instrument and there sounded into the hall clearly but wistfully a complete sentence; 'I DO believe in liberty!'

The applause at the end was barely polite, but it covered the antics of that part of the audience near me; a whole pantomime of malignant ridicule, meaning that Mr Forster and all his kind were already as extinct as the dodo. It was a discouraging moment.¹

¹ *The Days Before* (1953), pp. 117–18.

Gide spoke to a very different and rapturous reception, declaring his belief that 'individuals and their peculiarities can best flourish in a communist society' and prophesying a day 'when great literature could be made not, as till now, out of men's sufferings, but out of their joy'. The rest of the five days were filled with interminable harangues, interspersed with disturbances from the Surrealists and scuffles with the Trotskyites, who chanted the name of Victor Serge¹ and at one point tried to rush the platform and seize the microphone. The Russian delegation retorted with the official explanation of the Victor Serge affair, but so implausibly that Gide complained afterwards to the Russian ambassador, who assured him his letter would be put in the hands of Stalin himself. Aldous Huxley, meanwhile, wrote to Gide, complaining of the endless communist demagogery, where there might have been 'serious, technical discussions'. Forster reported the Congress, equivocally, in the *New Statesman* (6 July 1935), saying that 'Some of the speakers appeared to be journalists rather than creative artists, and some were Congress-addicts who would travel any distance for their drug. Yet it remained an impressive affair which only a common danger could have created.' A permanent bureau had been set up to continue the work of the Congress, and he urged fellow-writers to support it, for, he said, it was in danger of becoming 'a chapel of the One True Revolution', and English writers, though as a rule they 'cut so little ice on the Continent', might help to prevent this.

The phrase about 'cutting little ice' was written feelingly, for one of the attractions of the Congress, for him, had been the expectation of meeting Gide, with whom he had corresponded some years before and whose autobiography *Si le grain ne meurt* had impressed and astonished him. Thus he had been pleased when Gide and Malraux had invited him out to dinner. However, the very moment the meal had been consumed, the two French writers had got up and left – presenting Forster, so he said, with 'the spectacle of their distinguished backs'. Despite this, he wrote a glowing account of Gide's speech, in his *New Statesman* article, describing how Gide, who began

¹ Victor Serge, a Franco-Russian novelist and polemicist, was arrested by the G.P.U. in 1933, on trumped-up charges of Trotskyite activities, and sentenced to enforced exile in Orenbourg. As a result of the agitation at the Congress, aided by a personal plea to Stalin from Romain Rolland, he was released the same year and allowed to leave Russia.

with 'Airs and archery' had gradually forgotten himself, and 'his style became fluid as his thought soared and sentimentality passed into affection.'

In all, Forster did not feel his effort had been wasted, though believing, as he told John Lehmann (12 July 1935), that 'It is only at this particular moment of civilization that such a show is likely to be held. Next year every one may know their own minds' He had accepted election to the committee of the Permanent Bureau and wrote to various writers of his acquaintance, including Bernard Shaw, to join. Shaw, who was going through a flirtation with totalitarianism, returned a brusque retort:

Dear Forster,

I am very much obliged to you indeed for calling my attention to the fact that this International Association of Writers, which I have been officially invited to join, is a political conspiracy against Fascism. that is, against the German and Italian Governments and, in effect, against all governments which have discarded Liberal party parliamentarianism. An Italian writer who is a supporter of Mussolini will not join. An Italian writer who is anti-Fascist dare not join for fear of being sent to the Lipari islands. German writers, Polish writers, Hungarian writers, Turkish writers are similarly excluded

I will have nothing to do with such an exhibition of political imbecility and incorrigible Anarchism. And I strenuously advise you to follow my example.

Fortunately the silly business can do no harm because it can do nothing. It has cut its own throat with the first stroke of its pen.

Have you ever thought of the Committee for Intellectual Co-operation of the League of Nations as a possible instrument lying ready to our hands and quite neglected by us? I am too old to start on it; but if I were a beginner I should certainly organize an attempt to capture it. It is just dying to be taken notice of.

8 Trees

Even now, at the height of his public life, the larger part of Forster's existence was spent with his mother in Abinger. Their style of life had not been changed much by the move to West Hackhurst. Neither was very active in the village. Lily had acquired one or two 'pensioners' in the village, but it was not her style, nor was it Forster's, to play a great part in local functions. They were, of course, not without friends. There was a long-standing friendship between them and the local builder, William King, and his wife; and they were on chatting terms with various other neighbours – for instance with the Broyds at Hackhurst Farm, from whom they bought their milk. Forster was also friendly with the butcher's son, Ernest Read.¹ Read was an amateur archaeologist, and the two would go for walks together, searching for flint arrow-heads, and Forster would invite him back to supper in his study. In general, nevertheless, the Forsters were regarded in Abinger as a little aloof; and Forster himself, though liked, was considered by some as distinctly odd. Mrs Broyd once said, 'He's rather simple, isn't he?', and the remark had gone round. As for Ernest Read, he suspected a secret, and, when Forster had gone to South Africa in 1929, he had thought it must be on some 'hush-hush' work.

In 1934, however, Forster was drawn somewhat into village activities. It had been decided to stage a pageant in Abinger, in aid of the church-restoration fund, and the pageant-committee invited Forster to write the 'book'. The pageant was under the auspices of the Farrers of Abinger Hall (the family with whom many years

¹ He is mentioned in 'The Last of Abinger', in *Two Cheers for Democracy*.

before Lily had been a governess). The committee was headed by Lord Farrer,¹ who had offered the grounds of Abinger Hall for rehearsals, and Vaughan Williams, who lived nearby in Dorking and was a family connection of the Farrers² had agreed to provide the music. The producer was to be a young man of the village, named Tom Harrison, aided by an artistic adviser Miss Gwen Lally. Harrison, with the aid of one of Lord Farrer's daughters, had drawn up a scenario, and it was to be Forster's function to write the speeches and the programme notes

He applied himself dutifully to the task, sighing a little at the prospect. 'I have promised to write the Book of the Abinger Church Pageant,' he wrote to Sprott (30 April 1934) 'How I wish I could speak to Miss Velda [Sprott's sister] about it. Our producer, Mr T. Harrison, thinks very badly of Miss Gwen Lally's work indeed. He strikes me as a silly puppy, but I am unused to local efforts, and we know how very good they can be don't we . . . ?' The pageant was to contain the usual ingredients: ancient Britons in skins gathering fuel in the Abinger woods, a cry of 'Romans, the Romans!', arrival of the Saxons and of the Normans; the news of the Spanish Armada brought to Abinger, and so on. One aspect, however, caught Forster's imagination. Tom Harrison had suggested that the pageant should stress the theme of woods and trees, and Forster was much taken with this notion of a 'Pageant of Trees'³ and put his narration in the mouth of an Abinger woodman. In the Prologue, the Woodman addressed the audience thus:

Welcome to our village and our woods. I welcome you first to our woods, because they are the oldest. Before there were men in Abinger, there were trees. Thousands of years before the Britons came, the ash grew at High Ashes and the holly at Holmwood and the oak at Blindoak Gate; there were yew and juniper and box on the downs before ever the Pilgrims came along the Pilgrims' way. They greet you, and our village greets you.

What shall we show you? History? Yes, but the history of a village lost in the woods. Do not expect great deeds and grand

¹ Thomas Cecil Farrer, 2nd Baron (1859-1940).

² His mother was first cousin of Katherine Euphemia Farrer, second wife of the first Lord Farrer.

³ After the first performance, Forster wrote a letter to *The Times*, thanking the editor for the 'sympathetic' review of it, but regretting its failure to mention Tom Harrison, 'It is to him that the conception of a Pageant of Trees is due.'

people here Lord and Ladies, warriors and priests will pass, but this is not their home, they will pass like the leaves in autumn but the trees remain. The trees built our first houses and our first church, they roof our church today, they are with us from the cradle to the grave.

Forster, from childhood, had had a passionate fondness for trees, and such landowning instincts as he possessed were largely concerned with woods and trees. Adjoining West Hackhurst there lay a wood, of some four acres, called Piney Copse, and soon after he had settled there he had discovered that the wood was threatened, and on an impulse he had bought it, for the sum of £450. By doing so he had forestalled Lord Farrer, who would have liked to buy the wood himself, but Farrer had made way for Forster gracefully. The timber in Piney Copse had mostly been felled during the 1914-18 war, only a few straggling oaks remaining, and Forster had set to work to replant it. He did not much like oaks, because of their too-patriotic associations, and in restocking the wood he introduced a variety of other species: birch, rowan, beech, sweet chestnuts, horse chestnuts, wild cherries, crab-trees and conifers. At the thought of trees his mind became irrepressibly allegorical. He saw important virtues in a wood's being mixed in species - in its being, as one might say, a sort of Alexandria, cosmopolitan and racially mixed. Again, he approved of the spectacle of self-sown saplings - trees which had grown 'only because it occurred to them to do so'. For some reason the squirrels seemed to leave such saplings unharmed, and he reflected that the self-sown and the humble do sometimes escape in this way. He felt proud of his wood: even secretly patriotic, as though by means of it he were helping to maintain England. It had also drawn him just a little into village society, for he would throw the wood open for an annual school treat, going about it on the previous evening hanging the trees with toys, bags of sweets, and swatches of bananas.

From the beginning, he foresaw the effect that the wood might have on him, depicting this satirically in an essay, 'My Wood', published in the *New Leader* in 1926. In the first place (the essay ran) the wood made him feel heavy and laden and a 'man of weight', like the one who failed to get into the kingdom of Heaven. In the second place, it made him feel it ought to be larger.

The other day I heard a twig snap on it. I was annoyed at first, for I thought that someone was blackberrying, and depreciating

the value of the undergrowth. On coming nearer, I saw it was not a man who had trodden on the twig and snapped it, but a bird, and I felt pleased. My bird. The bird was not equally pleased. Ignoring the relation between us, it took fright as soon as it saw the shape of my face, and flew straight over the boundary hedge into a field, the property of Mrs Hennessy, where it sat down with a loud squawk. It had become Mrs Hennessy's bird. Something seemed grossly amiss here, something that would not have occurred had the wood been larger. I could not afford to buy Mrs Hennessy out, I dared not murder her, and limitations of this sort beset me on every side. Ahab did not want that vineyard – he only needed it to round off his property preparatory to plotting a new curve – and all the land around my wood has become necessary to me in order to round off the wood. A boundary protects. But – poor little thing – the boundary ought in turn to be protected.

The essay was prophetic, for he was eventually to be parted both from his house and his wood, partly through his own fault, and was made to reflect ruefully on the influence of property on his character.

How he came to lose his property is a long, petty and slow-moving country tale. From the time of Aunt Laura's first acquiring land from her friends the Farrers in 1877, the latter's lawyers (who were Farrers themselves) had disliked the transaction, regarding her proposed house as an evil. Thus, though she wanted to buy the land freehold, she was only allowed to take a lease; and, having been advised that she might begin building before formalities were all settled, she had found, too late, that the lease would be only for the very short term of sixty years. The lease was also hard on her in other ways, and friends told her it was iniquitous, but she had decided that her only plan was silence,¹ since any complaint might injure her friendship with Lady Farrer.²

Her friendship with the Farrers had thus continued; indeed it had strengthened, so that, during the second Lord Farrer's brief widowhood, she would sometimes act as hostess at his table. After Thomas Farrer's remarriage relations cooled a little, and during her last years, Forster gained the impression that she felt neglected. However, she never admitted it; and, to the eyes of the world at least,

¹ This, at least was her own account. Many years later, the Farrers' agent told Forster that, on the contrary, she had written 'vitriolic' letters.

² Euphemia Farrer, née Wedgwood, second wife of the first Lord Farrer.

she had remained till her death the close and honoured friend of the Farrer family.

Thus, when Forster inherited West Hackhurst, he assumed that, should he and his mother decide to occupy the house, Lord Farrer, out of friendship, would not insist strictly on the terms of the lease. To make sure, he put the question tactfully to him, and Farrer had replied, reasonably, that if he were still alive in 1937 he would be glad to consider an extension of the lease, but he did not feel he could bind his heirs. Forster, still anxious, pressed for stronger assurances, and to this Farrer answered, more frostily, that he did not understand what Forster wanted him to do.

From the beginning, therefore, of Forster and his mother's residence in Abinger there was some uneasiness in their minds over the house – also a faint edginess towards the Farrers personally. The Farrers owned most of the parish, and Tom Farrer played the lord of the manor in a rather heavy-handed fashion. Nevertheless, as connections of Aunt Laura's, Forster and Lily expected some notice from them, and it seemed slow in coming. Lily, indeed – being shy at the memory that she had once been a governess at Abinger Hall – would say that when the Farrers invited them to dinner she would not accept and would let Forster go on his own, for it would be him they really wanted. She need not have worried, for the invitation never came. The Farrers were cordial when encountered by chance, but otherwise they were silent. Or rather, so the Forsters said to themselves, they were silent till they wanted something, such as a subscription or a personal favour. A daughter of Lord Farrer asked Lily one day, in a breezy fashion, whether they were using Aunt Laura's old coachhouse, and if not, might she use it for her car? Lily refused rather sharply, saying it was full of furniture.

All this was insignificant, and the Forsters would merely say to each other, from time to time: 'Do you notice how little we hear of the Farrers?', or 'Really, the Farrers mightn't be there.' Then the day came when Forster went to Abinger Hall on a philanthropic errand. It was on behalf of his gardener, Henry Bone, whose brother Charles was in trouble, having been sent to prison for sexual assault. Lady Farrer,¹ who was a magistrate, had shown kindness and enterprise over the affair and had pulled strings for Charles Bone to be

transferred to a mental hospital. However, there had arisen a question as to which mental hospital he should go to. The Bone family had heard bad reports of the one of Lady Farrer's choice, and Forster had come to urge the claims of one at Brookwood.

He never felt at his best in Abinger Hall. He became, he thought, too ingratiating, and at the same time anxious to be 'independent and interesting'. Also, perhaps, too Bohemian. Unthinkingly, on the present visit, he sat, as he often did, perched sideways on the edge of his chair, with one knee on the floor, and it occurred to him, too late, that Lady Farrer might despise him for this. He wondered, too, whether scandal about his London life might not have reached her ears. He was thus in a selfconscious mood on this occasion, and the interview turned out badly. After much smiling debate, about personal relationships versus 'the interests of the community as a whole', Lady Farrer lost her temper and snubbed him: 'You cannot expect a separate institution for each case,' she said crushingly. He showed no reaction but, after an interval, snubbed her back. 'I quite agree, Lady Farrer,' he said, 'with what you were just saying about the impossibility of a separate institution for each person, but perhaps you will agree with me that when there are two institutions, one wants to choose the more suitable of the two?' He gained his point, and Charles Bone was sent to Brookwood as he wished, but the little clash was not forgotten.

Another ensued. When the lease of West Hackhurst was near to running out, Forster reminded Lord Farrer of his promise, and Farrer declared himself ready to honour his promise and continue the lease during Lily's lifetime. There was a snag, however. The lease would only be renewed on condition that Forster sold Lord Farrer Piney Copse. It was a reasonable proposal, for he was to retain the right to rent it during his lifetime. None the less it incensed Forster, who by now loved his wood dearly – feeling that in buying it he had shown himself independent, not a mere humble continuer of his aunt's traditions. Moreover, he did not like the declension in Lord Farrer's letters from 'Morgan' to 'Forster' to 'Mr Forster'. His lawyers told him he had no redress, but he pondered, and a cunning stratagem occurred to him. Lord Farrer was on the committee of the National Trust. What if he, Forster, were to undertake to leave the wood to the National Trust in his will? His lawyers could see no flaw in the plan. (They looked cross when he suggested it, which he

thought a good omen.) And accordingly a letter was concocted, saying that Mr Forster had a strong sentimental feeling for Piney Copse, as his one piece of freehold property, and was not disposed to sell it. Nevertheless, he realized that it affected the amenities of West Hackhurst, so he proposed to leave it to the National Trust, a body which, he knew, had Lord Farrer's warmest support. A silence ensued, lasting several months, and then at last a letter came, agreeing to the arrangement.

Two months later he was involved with the Farrers in a battle about a footpath. There was a field running down from West Hackhurst to the village, and Forster rented this, as Aunt Laura had done before him, for the sake of a path across it which provided the most direct route to the village. He had no other use for the field and when, some years before, the Cecil Farrers, Lord Farrer's son and daughter-in-law, had come to live nearby at High Hackhurst, Forster had renounced the upper half of the field to them. Now, however, he received a letter in the guise of a poem, supposedly from Mrs Farrer's horse May Moon, complaining that May Moon felt cramped for pasture, and asking, would not the kind Mr Forster give her the rest of the field? Forster returned a stinger, addressed to Cecil himself, saying that, while he commended his wife's literary skill, he felt in no mood to appreciate this informal approach, after the anxieties he had been put to over Piney Copse. Cecil replied that it was his wife's affair, not his, and could not Forster and she meet on the disputed territory for further discussion? They did so, and Mrs Farrer pointed out the new route she envisaged for the Forsters' path. It was much longer and ran past a slaughterhouse and through a bed of nettles, and Forster said he was afraid it would not suit his mother, who was now such a poor walker. Mrs Farrer, not listening, continued: 'There should be some pegs. Yes, here they are.' 'Pegs?' exclaimed Forster, 'How did they get there?' and she explained that Cecil and she had gone into the field in his absence and marked out the proposed new path. With hauteur he replied, 'I own myself greatly surprised'; and the two walked back uphill, and parted, without another word. No more was heard about the path for some years, so Forster had won another battle.

A battle, however, presupposes a war, and the thought of war seems to have originated on Forster's rather than on the Farrers' side. There was some anti-upper-class feeling involved. He com-

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plained to Bob Buckingham, at the time of the footpath row: 'These are the people who will be heirs to a considerable property and were educated at Eton . . .' etc. And combined with this there was the growth in his own landowning and proprietorial feelings. He came later to see them as having been unsuitable for him: they had not, he reflected, made him more tolerant and civilized. In a memoir,¹ written in bitterness after his expulsion from West Hackhurst, he scathingly recorded a memory of them:

Once I attended at Dorking a meeting of landowners who were trying to obstruct rural development. I was humble in their company and watched with awe an arrogant old hag come tottering on the arm of her cockaded chauffeur. Our aim was to make the country inaccessible to common people. Elbow to elbow, acre to acre, we were to stand firm. The old lady spoke almost inaudibly, and her remarks were respectfully megaphoned to the chairman. She signalled, the chauffeur was summoned, and she tottered away. A feeling of well-being came over me, yes, I was among my own sort at last, and I beamed at Tom Farrer, who made no acknowledgement. That was my nearest approach to feudalism. My next nearest had been at the age of fourteen, in the Howards End house in Hertfordshire. We were turned out of it. If the land had welcomed me then, if it had welcomed me more effectively at West Hackhurst, the Tory side of my character would have developed, and my liberalism been atrophied.

¹ "West Hackhurst: a Surrey Ramble." The present chapter is largely based on this memoir.

9 The Last Parade

The contest over Bob Buckingham had continued but was now less near the surface. For one thing, May was preoccupied with her son Robin. And apart from this, she had long accepted that Bob should have a separate life with Forster and Forster's friends. It had not wrecked their marriage. Indeed the marriage had proved a most successful one. They had a cheerful social life in Shepherd's Bush, had become mildly 'artistic', and were very up-to-date as parents; Rob's sleep-time and the temperature of his food were calculated according to the latest theories. They became quite censorious of a young policeman friend and his wife upstairs, over their old-fashioned methods of child-rearing.

Then, at the beginning of 1935, it was discovered that May was suffering from tuberculosis. She was quite seriously ill and would have to go to a sanatorium for at least a year. Forster was greatly concerned at the news. By now, for better for worse, he was firmly established as the family friend, and he took part in all the discussions and arrangements. It was decided to send Robin to a sister of May's; and since Bob, who was a hypochondriac, was persuading himself he might be tubercular too, Forster made a pact with May to watch over him and report to her. May had laughed at the torrent of notes from him to Bob that had flowed through their letter-box. Now she began to receive such a stream too. Forster sent her books and suggestions for reading, offered her pictures and photographs for the walls of her room at the sanatorium, and gave her much sympathetic advice. 'The great thing,' he wrote (10 April 1935), 'is that you and R. should worry about one another as little as possible - mutual worry is like holding up two looking glasses in

front of each other, so that a thing gets reflected to infinity.' He went sometimes to see her at the sanatorium at Pinewood (though, as he remarked to Bob, he found he got on better with her by letter), and he recruited various friends of his to visit her too. For some time now he had come to revise his opinion of her, admitting grudgingly that she was 'a decent sort' and inventing the theory that it was a case of a good person (Bob) – together with the baby – transforming an inferior one. Now he began actually to warm to her; and she, who had always wanted his friendship, responded with great good will. By imperceptible degrees during this year, the two became friends and allies.

* * *

T. E. Lawrence had returned from India in 1929, having once more been hunted out from a retreat by newspaper reports, which said, this time, that he was Britain's 'top spy' and had been fomenting a revolt in Afghanistan.¹ He had been posted first to Plymouth, to work on R.A.F. flying-boats, going subsequently to Southampton, where he had been employed in experimental work on speedboat design. He was, meanwhile, conducting a behind-the-scenes campaign for the improvement of conditions in the Services. He had aged and was less restless, though still half-toying with visions of himself as a national saviour.² Forster would go down to see him at Plymouth or Southampton from time to time and would be taken for trips in Lawrence's speedboat. When Frederic Manning's outspoken novel of trench-life, *Her Privates We*, was published in 1930, Lawrence, who was a friend of Manning's, induced Forster to read it, and Forster, who was greatly impressed, went to some lengths to promote Manning's reputation. Lawrence made much of Forster's friendship, telling Robert Graves, in 1933: 'I think Frederic Manning and an Armenian called Altounyan,³ and E. M. Forster are the three I most care for, since Hogarth⁴ died.'

¹ He may have helped to spread the rumours himself.

² Winston Churchill wanted him, when he retired from the R.A.F., to help to re-organize the nation's defences.

³ Ernest Altounyan (1889–1962). He was a doctor and poet and published a sequence of poems *Ornament of Honour* (1937) in memory of Lawrence. Forster was very friendly with him round about 1915 but they were later estranged.

⁴ D. G. Hogarth (1862–1927), the archaeologist and orientalist, a major influence on Lawrence's career.

Lawrence received his discharge from the R.A.F. in 1935 and was planning to spend his retirement in his Clouds Hill cottage. He wrote to Forster (26 November 1934) that he was looking forward 'fantastically' to receiving him at Clouds Hill. 'There are no beds (but two sleeping bags embroidered MEUM and TUUM) no food, no drains: nightjars (outdoor pattern) and wood fires and slow talk. Many good records upstairs, and a windy gramophone.' Forster offered himself for the 13th of the following May, receiving back a postcard (bearing the printed legend. 'To tell you that in future I shall write very few letters. T.E.S.¹) to say that his arrival would be marked by the setting of a white stone into a newly-built wall. On the very day, however, that Forster was to arrive, he received the news of Lawrence's fatal motor-cycle accident.

The affair, like so much else in Lawrence's life, was surrounded with mystery and official secrecy, and it affected Forster powerfully. He did not attend the funeral, but went down to Clouds Hill a few days afterwards, in the company of Sassoon and his wife, and was shown by a young neighbour and friend of Lawrence's, Pat Knowles, the preparations Lawrence and Knowles had made for Forster's visit. 'Every thing very grey and quiet and touching in the rhododendron dell,' Forster wrote to Isherwood (1 June 1935), 'but outside I knew Lord Lloyd² was waiting. S. said he looked absolutely foul at the funeral. Well he must vomit for someone else now.'

The thought of Lawrence, his complex personality and his strange fate, stayed with Forster. He felt it possible that, if Lawrence had not died, some reactionary group might have got hold of him and tried to turn him into a leader. (It was an idea shared by Christopher Isherwood, whose next literary undertaking was *The Ascent of F 6*, a play – written jointly with Auden – about a Lawrence-like 'leader-figure' of this kind.) Lawrence's brother and executor, Professor A. W. Lawrence, did not want a biography written. Instead, he proposed a large edition of Lawrence's letters, and, knowing of Forster's friendship with his brother, he invited Forster to edit the volume. The notion excited Forster, and he accepted, feeling pleased to be labouring once more on Lawrence's behalf. The book was to be an

¹ i.e. 'T. E. Shaw'.

² Lord Lloyd of Dolobran (1879–1941), High Commissioner in Egypt 1925–9 and a friend of Lawrence's for many years. The reason for Forster's hostility is not clear.

ambitious affair, and he pondered how to shape it. Desmond MacCarthy advised him to divide the letters into thematic groups, supplying a separate commentary to each group – the whole to lead gradually to a final grand character-portrait and estimate of Lawrence. It seemed a promising scheme, and he adopted it, finding the portrait of Lawrence soon growing under his hands

. . . if when the schoolboy grows up he takes to archaeology seriously, he seldom loses this primitive excitement, this thrill of adventure, reinforcing the thrill of research. The trespassing-spirit persists, the angry farmer becomes an Arab with a gun, the clergyman and the policeman coalesce into a foreign government, which it is a pleasure to fool and a duty to spy on. It is not surprising that so many archaeologists take to secret service and do well in it. Their mentality as well as their opportunities qualifies them.

. Those who get the best out of orientals usually despise the East, but he was always able to respect while he controlled them, it was one of his great virtues. And at Carchemish the idea of a crusade, vaguely conceived amongst medieval oddments, takes a bold habitation and a non-Christian character: he will free the Arabs

. . . The notion of a crusade, of a body of men leaving one country to do noble deeds in another, now possessed him, and I think it never left him, though the locality of the other country varied: at one time it was Arabia, later on it was the air. Had he been a Christian, his medieval equipment would have been complete and thought-proof: he would have possessed a positive faith and been happier: he would have been the 'parfit gentil knight', the defender of orthodoxy, instead of the troubled and troublous genius who fascinated his generation and failed to fit into it. He would have been much smaller.

* * *

Forster was now in close touch with Isherwood. By this time he had given Isherwood *Maurice* to read, and this had helped cement their friendship. Isherwood had been impressed by the novel and to Forster's enquiry 'Does it date?' had answered 'Why *shouldn't* it date?' From then on it had become a favourite occupation of theirs to devise endings to the novel.¹ Isherwood's own new novel *Mr Norris Changes Trains* had come out early in 1935, and Forster wrote to

¹ See Isherwood's *Christopher and his Kind* (1976), pp. 125–7.

[1935]

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him about it (11 May 1935) with a mixture of admiration and reserve:

Have now read Mr Norris twice and have had much admiration and enjoyment I liked it less the first time because it is not altogether my sort of book – dwells on contradictions rather than the complexities of character and seems to reveal people facet by facet whereas the Memorial if my memory serves tackled strata. However I got over that and managed to read what you've written, I think. The construction is fine and Margot was a complete surprise to me. It's marvellous too the way you've maintained standards of right and wrong and yet left Norris an endearing person. And you've made him both silly and witty, like a character in Congreve. He's awfully good. The necessity of combining knowingness and honesty in William renders him more of a problem, for in art these are uneasy bedfellows. However you bring him through pretty well. I was a little worried in Switzerland to what extent he was paying his employer's way with the Baron. Did he go the whole hog or turn a pig-skin cheek? I don't the least mind, but feel that in the first case he would violate the fastidiousness and in the second the integrity of his character. – Still perhaps I needn't worry, for he was only hired to make the Baron move, not to make him happy . . .

Isherwood was living with a young German named Heinz. Heinz had fled Germany to escape conscription, and, partly for this reason, the two were continually on their travels, moving from Greece to the Canary Isles to Brussels to Amsterdam in quest of some alternative citizenship for Heinz. From one country or another Isherwood repeatedly urged Forster to join them, and this summer – May Buckingham being still in the sanatorium – Forster took Bob Buckingham to stay with Isherwood in Amsterdam. The city was then a resort for anti-fascist writers, forming a circle round Klaus Mann, who was running a newspaper there. Stephen Spender and Brian Howard were in Amsterdam when Forster arrived, as was Gerald Hamilton, the original or part-original, of Isherwood's 'Mr Norris'. The English party, Forster and Buckingham among them, went about Holland on a sightseeing tour, talking loudly against Hitler wherever they went. In a restaurant in The Hague (in which there was a large lady with a whip) they became aware of two detectives or spies listening to their conversation. The detectives followed them through the Mauritshuis gallery, then disappeared in the wake of Hamilton, who took the train for Rotterdam; but the

same evening in Amsterdam, another spy attached himself to the party in a café. At least, Bob thought it was a spy, Forster reported to May Buckingham, 'It may have been mere honest curiosity – you know how Stephen Spender squeals and giggles, and his sounds must have been carrying far through the night.'

* * *

For much of the autumn of 1935 Forster was going through old articles of his, making a selection for the volume *Abinger Harvest*. He gave a good deal of creative thought to the shaping of the volume, also taking advice from friends, especially William Plomer. As late as the proof stage he was writing to Plomer (24 November 1935): 'Can you support me in withdrawing from Part I: Kipling, Edward VII and the Clemenceau novel¹ they are all good, but weaken the section. They cannot go into Part II, because nothing is ragged there. – Roger Fry also interpolates, he might close Part III but I don't think so.' There had been argument about a title for the book, and, he told Plomer, people made 'a face like a shrew mouse' when they heard what he had chosen.

He was working under difficulties. For a year or two he had been suffering from a bladder disorder, and he had now begun to have sick headaches. Eventually, in December, he was told that he must have an operation on the prostate. His mother, though usually calm in the face of illness, was alarmist and convinced herself he would die under the operation. He, remembering Dickinson, thought this quite likely himself. Half an hour before leaving for the nursing-home, he wrote Bob Buckingham a tender letter, telling him he felt cheerful and calm but 'have an open mind whether I shall get through or not. I don't feel afraid of anything, and it is your love that has made me like this.'

The first part of the operation was performed on 18 December and, soon after it, blithe messages were arriving from him. To Bob Buckingham, 'Tell May that I have started re-reading "Mansfield Park" and not Lady Bertram could feel more tranquil.' To Bessie Trevelyan, 'I write to most people in pencil if at all, to underline how ill I am, but ink is more convenient really . . .' The second and main part of the operation was performed in February. It was again quite successful, but the wound took long to heal, so that he remained in

¹ Review of *The Strongest*, by Georges Clemenceau, in the *Athenaeum*, 27 February 1920.

the nursing-home all through March. He was full of plans for what he would do on his recovery. He meant, he told Isherwood (25 February 1936), to 'visit the English Lakes, Portugal and Dorsetshire, reform the Police Courts, read all Milton, not lift a finger to hinder the next world-war, be very kind, very selfish, and incidentally write masterpieces.' However, a fortnight after his release from the nursing-home, he received a new and different kind of blow: Arnold's wrote to tell him that he was to be sued for libel.

The occasion was an article, 'A Flood in the Office' – one of those from his Egyptian period, which he had reprinted in *Abinger Harvest*. It was a review of a pamphlet in which Sir William Willcocks, an engineer in the Egyptian administration, had attacked a fellow-engineer, Sir Murdoch MacDonald, over his projects for the Nile waters. It was an entertaining piece, picturing the two sources of the Nile as another pair of warring old gentlemen, and it came down strongly on Sir William's side. However, as it now appeared, Sir Murdoch had, in the meantime, sued Sir William for libel in an Egyptian court and won his case; thus Forster, by reprinting the article, had unwittingly but indisputably repeated a libel. At first it seemed as if Sir Murdoch would settle for the withdrawal of *Abinger Harvest* in its present form, combined perhaps with a formal apology and a token payment to charity. 'We staged him as a nice cross old gentleman,' Forster told Isherwood. However, it turned out that Sir Murdoch was an unforgiving old gentleman and was out for heavy damages, and Forster and Arnold's had, in the end, to pay £500 in damages plus costs. This, with the considerable expense of withdrawing and reissuing *Abinger Harvest* without the offending article, was a serious blow to Forster. In his state of physical weakness he took it very hard. He began to worry about libel dangers in his work on T. E. Lawrence, which indeed were considerable, and tried to extract a guarantee of immunity from the Lawrence trustees. They were sympathetic but could not give him the full assurance that he wanted, and after protracted negotiations, he decided to resign from the editorship of the letters. It left him feeling sore – not with the Lawrence trustees, but with the libel laws. It had discouraged and thwarted him in his writing hopes, and as a result he did not undertake another book for fifteen or more years.

* * *

During July, while he was still convalescing, he went with his

mother to stay in Dover, in some lodgings rented by Joe Ackerley. Dover had begun to be a vogue among his friends. William Plomer spent a whole year at about this period in a flat at the West end of the promenade. He was followed by Joe Ackerley, who took rooms there for several summers. Isherwood and W. H. Auden¹ would come there for briefer periods, and Leo Charlton and Tom Whichelo eventually deserted Maida Vale to settle in Dover permanently (or, in Leo's fruity phrase, to 'pitch camp beneath the lintel of England's continental doorway').

It was a pretty place, a bafrack-town of fine early-Victorian terraces crowned by a Norman castle and encircled by grassy hills. Tourists did not visit it much, and the streets were quiet by day, while at evening the pubs filled up with soldiers from the four regiments garrisoned there. Plomer in his memoirs² describes the 'frou-frou' of kilts in the streets, and Auden also evoked the spectacle in his poem 'Dover'.

Soldiers crowd into the pubs in their pretty clothes,
As pink and as silly as girls from a high-class academy.

The soldiers were a leading attraction, especially for Charlton and Ackerley, who would comb the pubs in the evening.³ But, apart from this, the place was convenient for habitual travellers like Isherwood and Auden, who would stay with friends there on their way to Brussels or Amsterdam or would arrange meetings with them at the nearby Ostend. Further, the place had a symbolical or allegorical significance. To live in Dover, the last extremity of England, had a flavour of Europeanism. (This aspect was likewise caught in Auden's poem:

¹ Auden would come there to write and would work with the blinds drawn against the daylight. May Buckingham, who sometimes stayed there as Forster's guest, remembered Auden emerging from his rooms, with white face, blinking like an owl. It also worried her how appallingly he bit his nails.

² *At Home* (1958), p. 154.

³ Oddly, however, in *More Charlton* (1940), Leo Charlton wrote with sanctimonious severity of those who came to Dover for 'the satisfaction of unwholesome appetites'.

From London, from neighbouring resorts, men would appear who were clearly recognizable for what they were. Flabby features, an effeminate bulk of body, a mincing gait, furtive glances and a curious clipped pronunciation marked the type, whose prey was youth and whose bait was silver coin.

Aeroplanes drone through the new European air
On the edge of a sky that makes England of minor importance.)

Forster became fond of the place and the life that had developed there, and over this and the following two summers he came there repeatedly, bringing his mother or the Buckinghams or friends like John Simpson and Sprott. He took lodgings with the same landladies as Joe Ackerley, two friendly but very 'correct' sisters nicknamed by Leo Charlton 'the Holy Ladies'.

At Dover, and elsewhere, he was now seeing something of W. H. Auden. Auden, the previous year, had married Erika Mann, Thomas Mann's daughter, as a device to procure her a British passport, and he wanted other homosexuals to make similar marriages ('What are buggers for?' he would say). With Forster's help, he recruited John Simpson, arranging for him to marry a German actress friend of Erika's, Therese Giehse. The marriage took place in a registry office in Solihull. (Auden – in striped trousers and with a carnation – took charge with great zest, answering all the clerk's questions on the bride's behalf and standing double brandies all round after the ceremony, declaring 'It's on Thomas Mann'.) Auden and Isherwood had completed their play, *The Ascent of F 6*. It was published in book form in October 1936, receiving a flattering review from Forster in the *Listener*, and a stage-production by Rupert Doone's Group Theatre company was arranged at the Mercury Theatre in Notting Hill Gate for the following February. It was an important occasion for them and their group. Benjamin Britten, then twenty-three, had been engaged to write incidental music, and Auden's friend, the painter Robert Medley, was to design the sets. Forster came to a dress-rehearsal and witnessed an angry scene between Britten and Rupert Doone, when Doone – a very *prima donna*-ish director – demanded last-minute cuts in Britten's score. He brought Bob Buckingham and John Simpson to the opening night. Isherwood was in high excitement before the curtain rose. 'Oh dear! Oh dear!' he kept saying, 'What shall I do? I don't think I can sit down,' till Bob Buckingham took him out for a drink in a nearby pub. Next day, Forster wrote him a detailed critique of the production:

... Act I – splendid. My only query was Mrs R's circumambulation, the discussion about the two sons, and the shrinking away of Levantine James: 'But this will come clear later on.'

Act II – kept me more critical The *monk* – not good nor good to look at. Presages are not interesting in themselves, and Ransom's, which is interesting, comes out well enough in his ensuing talk with the Abbot. John S[impson] and I felt the monk could be cut

The *Abbot* – the finest scene in the whole play Quite marvellous. Then troubles gather, for which the meagre scenery isn't wholly responsible. The elimination of Lamp made me wonder 'How will they get rid of the other two?' Ian's was good – jealousy does carry one along. David's too slow. Then Ransom – falling into the audience almost, realistic, panting 'I will kill the demon' – it wouldn't live in that theatrical bleakness, nor would Mrs R's rocking chair.

He had disliked the Freudian *coup de théâtre* in the last act, in which the hero, on the mountain-top, is spectrally confronted by his mother, seated in her rocking-chair. He told Isherwood 'Mother on the ice-throne, not rocking-chair. The rocking-chair is the sounder, but it won't come across. It's a moment when you *must* sacrifice psychological propriety to poetry.' Others too had objected to this scene, and for the next week or so they tried out a different ending each night. When Auden, who had been in Spain, eventually came to see the play, he exclaimed to Isherwood in a loud and carrying whisper: 'My *dear*, what have you *done* to it?'

Forster admired, and rather idealized, Isherwood's anxious efforts on behalf of Heinz, which seemed to him an epitome of friendship's role in the present state of Europe. A month or two after the play, he had a chance to give Heinz a helping hand himself. Heinz was alone in Paris, penniless and in trouble with the police, and Forster and Auden, who happened to be in Paris at the time, went about borrowing money from friends to get him out of the country and into Luxembourg. It was nearly the end of Heinz's wanderings, for shortly afterwards, as part of an expensive (and possibly quite phantasmal) plan concocted by Gerald Hamilton to procure him a Mexican passport, he ventured into German-occupied Trier and was at once arrested.

* * *

Steadily, the crisis in Europe invaded Forster's thoughts. '... the collapse of civilization seems to eat up from below in to any thing I do', he recorded in his Commonplace Book (5 September 1936). He recalled how Machiavelli and certain Chinese sages had believed that,

to tranquillize the mind before reading and writing, one must perform prescribed rituals, reflecting how contemptuous he would once have been of such weakness. Now he felt differently:

A clean table and proper lighting made me solider, I find. Tonight I have swept all the rubbish off my board and read some of Oedipus Tyrannus with only the lamp and two vases in sight. One vase had four roses, the other a spray of oak leaves the acorns, when the sun falls on them, have a blue bloom.

When, on 5 January 1937, he read the news of the landing of 10,500 Italian troops in Spain, he wrote to Isherwood telling him he felt the world to be 'close to the edge'. In the present time, he said, the passage in literature which most satisfied him was the one in *War and Peace* about the Russians after the fall of Moscow '... Those who were striving to understand the general course of events, and trying by self-sacrifice and heroism to take a hand in it, were the most useless members of society, they saw everything upside down, and all they did for the common good proved to be futile and absurd.'¹

There was much going-and-coming of his younger left-wing friends between England and Spain, and the spectacle impressed him as dubious and frivolous. 'Did you know that Christopher, Stephen, Auden and some more geese were going to a literary conference at Valencia including a day at *Madrid*?' he wrote to Bob Buckingham in June 1937. 'I never heard such nonsense, and the Foreign Office fortunately shares my feelings and has refused them visas.' When, at a party, one of his friends asked him why he wasn't going to Spain himself, he answered, deflatingly, 'Afraid to!' By contrast, when Stephen Spender wrote to him in distress over his friend Tony Hyndman,² who had joined the International Brigade, and asked Forster to use his influence with Harry Pollitt³ to get Hyndman released, he persuaded Spender that he should go to Hyndman's rescue himself.

Now that his waking thoughts were hag-ridden by international affairs, he found himself living a more and more vivid nocturnal dream-life, repeatedly waking with a dream-sentence on his lips. He made a collection of such sentences in his Commonplace Book: 'The

¹ *War and Peace*, trans. Rosemary Edmonds; Book 4, Part I, Section IV.

² See Spender's *World Within World* (1951) for a long account of this episode.

³ General Secretary of the Communist Party in Great Britain.

proud treacherous night has almost puzzled me'; 'How country-simple the white mice! How very young . . .'; 'A pretty face, An eager pleasure to become the bride of either snoozling soldier'; 'I merely told you the intelligent talk of an important husband', 'Oh I always do admire the royal family of your foolery'. He welcomed the dreams, which gave him a sense of freshness and richness, but he told Isherwood he thought them a proof that as a novelist he had 'gone underground'. Occasionally, too, in his waking hours, he had moments of a pure and mystical self-forgetfulness in which – as was always the tendency of Forster's imagination – the world seemed to become more real rather than less.¹ A note, headed 'Bunch of Sensations', records one such moment:

Listening in the late dusk to gramophone records I did not know; smoking, the quarter moon shone as the light faded, and brought out sections of my books, motors coming down the Felday road shone through the window and flung the tulip tree and pane shadows on the wallpaper near the fireplace. When the music stopped I felt something had arrived in the room; the sense of a world that asks to be noticed rather than explained was again upon me.

His life with his mother continued much as before, a mixture of devotion and exasperation. At seventy, Lily had grown dumpy, solid and matriarchal – not a dragon, but someone whose wishes were to be obeyed. She was soft-voiced and outwardly serene, making a joke of anything she disliked, and caricaturing her own intolerances. She once told her nephew, Philip Whichelo,² how a young girl had said to her, 'Oh don't be silly.' 'That dished her,' said Lily. In late years she had become a wireless-addict, saying that the wireless had cured her loneliness, and if bored or irritated she would clamp on her ear-phones. Florence Barger, who believed in serious conversation, complained: 'I think you would listen to nonsense on that thing, rather than not listen.' 'Well yes, dear,' answered Lily, 'I think that at my age I would.'

¹ In Forster's descriptive passage in his novels, he constantly writes as though inanimate nature had purposes and volitions of its own. I remember him in the last year of his life saying, during a car-drive, that ancient roads 'still consented to move him'.

² Philip Whichelo (1905–), son of Lily's brother Horace. He became an artist and stage-designer.

To Forster's London friends she was always very pleasant – even, with an effort, showing graciousness to Bob Buckingham, whom she resented, and making quite a friendship with May Buckingham. Of Sprott and Plomer she had a high opinion. When, a year or two later, Plomer published a description of Forster,¹ mentioning his dowdy appearance, she was delighted. 'You see, Morgie, what Mr Plomer says about you,' she said. 'How often have I told you to brush your coat.' Joe Ackerley pleased her less. She thought him not quite the thing. Once he came to lunch at West Hackhurst in an open-necked short-sleeved shirt, and she remarked afterwards, 'Wasn't that an *extraordinary* thing to do?' Ackerley was scurrilous about her, referring to her, to Forster, as 'Your mouldy old mother.'

To outside observers she and Forster seemed very close, almost as if sharing a private language. He would play up to her with, as he called it, 'bright prankishness' and was endlessly solicitous for her welfare, hinting to visitors how they might give her pleasure. ('I think she would be very interested in that.') He knew her fears and did his best to protect her from them. Once, when he was visiting his Aunt Rosalie in Putney, his aunt said she had just written to Lily, reporting that Nellie was ill and must go to hospital. He was angry, thinking this an inconsiderate way to break the news, and, putting down his teacup, instantly set off home to forestall the letter. In a way, now that his fate as a writer was settled, his dependence on Lily irked him less deeply, and he could see more clearly what he owed her. 'I wonder whether women are important to one's comfort and stability,' he wrote to Ackerley at about this period.

I am inclined to think that may be. Although my mother has been intermittently tiresome for the last thirty years, cramped and warped my genius, hindered my career, blocked and bugged up my house, and boycotted my beloved, I have to admit that she has provided a sort of rich subsoil where I have been able to rest and grow. That, rather than sex or wifeness, seems to be women's special gift to men.

* * *

In the space of six months, during 1937, Forster lost the two closest of his Indian friends, Masood and Tukoji, the now-deposed Maharaja of Dewas. (In a way, their fates had a certain resemblance.) Masood,

¹ Later incorporated in his autobiography *At Home* (1958), p. 107.

having accepted the Vice-Chancellorship at Aligarh in 1929, had thrown himself into his role with energy. He was a skilful fund-raiser and had done much to restore the University's reputation. Nevertheless, from the start, he had had powerful enemies in Aligarh, both political and private ones, and he was not well equipped to cope with opposition; he was too high-handed, too inclined to ask 'Are you for me or against me?' He had, moreover, from quite early on, offended the British authorities, by inviting Gandhi and Nehru to speak at Aligarh. The opposition to him had grown, and in 1934 he had been outvoted in the University Court over the matter of a staff appointment. His friends told him that the meeting had been deliberately packed with 'flunkeys' of the government, flown in for the occasion by chartered plane, and in dudgeon he had resigned. This defeat, taking place in the University created by his own grandfather, had more or less wrecked him. His friend and colleague Sherwani saw him the day before he left Aligarh, sitting forlornly in his dismantled drawing-room; he cried to Sherwani, 'I persuaded you to come here. I was wrong to do so. It is no place for any self-respecting person.'¹

His friend the Begum of Bhopal had come to his aid, giving him a post as Minister of Education in her state, but he had never recovered his spirits; he was, so Sherwani said, a 'bathos' in his last years, even intellectually. He died of kidney-disease on 30 July 1937, at the age of forty-seven, and his body was flown back to Aligarh and buried in the University mosque. While at Bhopal, Masood had found a place at court for his old friend the poet Iqbal, and Iqbal inscribed on his tomb some lines in Persian originally intended for his own epitaph. He also wrote an elegy on Masood, describing him as 'the most precious possession of the nation's caravan'²

Forster and Masood had drifted apart in recent years – Forster had found Masood 'too pompous and reticent'. Nevertheless, the brief announcement of the death in *The Times* came as a deep shock to Forster. Masood's son Akbar hurried back from France to join him, and for a few days the two waited anxiously for further news; there seemed to be some mystery about the death and, now or later,

¹ Information from Professor Sherwani.

² In the years to come, Masood came to be honoured as one of the heroes of Pakistan, and a 'Ross Masood Education and Culture Society' was founded in Karachi. A symposium on him, *Muraqqa-e-Masood*, edited by Jahlil A. Kidwai, was published in Karachi on 'Ross Masood Day' in 1966.

vague rumours of poisoning. Eventually Forster bought Akbar an air-ticket and saw him off to India, guessing – rightly – that he would find much family dissension and little in the way of inheritance. Soon after the death, there was a memorial number in Masood's honour in the Urdu journal *Anjuman-e-Taraqqi-e-Urdū* and Forster contributed a loving account of him.¹ 'There never was anyone like him,' it said, 'and there never will be anyone like him.' He never forgot Masood or what their friendship had meant to him. A year or so later he was visiting Akbar at Oxford, in his college rooms, and saw a drawing of Masood on the wall. He told Akbar it was so lifelike, he could not bear to sit with it, and asked if they could go out.²

The Maharaja of Dewas died in December of the same year, and his final years were a tragedy on a vaster scale. Tukoji's reputation and fortunes had never really recovered from the scandal of 1928. At about the same time as this scandal, there had been complaints by the peasants of Dewas of illegal exactions on his part. A commission of inquiry had been demanded. And meanwhile, the Maharaja of Kolhapur, Tukoji's chief enemy, had gained the ear of the Governor-General of Bombay and had filled it with rumours: that Tukoji was deliberately ruining his state, so as to embarrass his son on his accession, or alternatively that he was trying to oust his son from the succession in favour of a son by his second wife, Bai Saheba.³ The Maharaja of Kolhapur was even allowed to propose what terms the British should offer Dewas and claimed that, if they were refused, he had evidence to discredit Tukoji entirely.

From year to year, the situation had grown worse. Tukoji had temporized, repaired some of the worse failings in his administration, had chattered for loans from his fellow-princes and, growing desperate, had invited a British friend, a doctor named Sir James Roberts, to help him put his State in order. Eventually, though, the authorities had lost patience and, as their phrase went, had decided to 'put this Maharaja out of business'. And at this point, the most dramatic developments had taken place. The Maharaja, under pretext of going on pilgrimage to South India, had absconded from his State, bearing with him its remaining treasures, and had taken refuge in Pondicherry in French India. The move, whether conceived as vengeance or as

¹ Reprinted in *Two Cheers for Democracy*

² Told to the author by the late Akbar Masood.

³ The erstwhile 'Diamond concubine', now Maharani.

diplomacy, had been quite fatal for the Maharaja, the completest *débâcle* imaginable. He had lived on for four miserable years, dishonoured, almost destitute, crowded with his large family into a shabby little house in Pondicherry, despatching innumerable and interminable telegrams to the Viceroy and to English politicians. Malcolm Darling had gone to see him in 1934, after he had been on a weeks-long penitential fast. It was a touching reunion. The Maharaja, a grey-bearded holy man, had laid his head in Darling's lap and wept. None the less, as soon as his 'case' came up, he had been as intransigent as ever. He declared. 'I am a Rajput and I should be false to all my traditions if I compromised my honour. I would much rather die than do that.' The tender-hearted Darling, after his departure, had sent the Maharaja a cheque, for more money than he could well afford, and had continued to intercede on his behalf with the British authorities – being rebuffed for his pains. He knew that, to the outside observer, the Maharaja had put himself hopelessly in the wrong. Yet he felt, and imbued Forster with the feeling, that he had been mishandled by the British. They had been 'impeccably correct' in their behaviour, and 'absolutely wrong'.¹

On the Maharaja's death, *The Times* gave him a censorious obituary. It ran: 'He came of an ancient and renowned dynasty, and in the earlier years of his rule gave some promise of doing well, but an ungovernable temper and self-indulgence led to serious deterioration. . . .' The obituary enraged Forster, who thought it 'a model of ungenerous and *prîm* indignation', and, in a letter published on 28 December, he did what he could in the way of rehabilitation. He wrote:

SIR TUKOJI RAO PUAR

As a friend of exactly twenty-five years' standing, may I be allowed to add a tribute of affection to the account published in your columns of the late Maharaja of Dewas (Senior Branch). Whatever his weaknesses as ruler, he possessed incomparable qualities as an individual: he was witty, gay, charming, hospitable, imaginative, and devoted, and he had above all a living sense of religion which enabled him to transcend the barriers of his creed and to make contact with all the forms of belief and disbelief. I am not the only English person who will mourn 'Bapu Sahib',

¹ *The Hull of Devi* (1953), p. 171. The last paragraph of Darling's autobiography *Apprentice to Power* (1966), which voices similar sentiments, was partly drafted by Forster. For further details of the affair, see Appendix, pp. 333–6.

as we called him, and who will never forget his vivid and unique personality or cease to remember him with love.

* * *

Since his illness Forster had been less active on the public scene. The illness had forced him to resign the presidency of the N.C.C.L.; and his work for the Permanent Bureau of Malraux's *Writers in Defence of Culture* did not amount to much, though once or twice he did some peace-making between the French and English branches. In the summer of 1937, however, he agreed to take part in an *entretien* organized by the League of Nations Committee for Intellectual Co-operation. This was the body which Bernard Shaw had advised him to exploit, it had been conceived early in the 1920s by Henri Bergson, to be an expression of 'the deepest spirit of the League', and recently had been taken up with enthusiasm by Gilbert Murray, who had become president. The *entretien*, on 'The Immediate Future of Literature', was a four-day affair beginning in July and chaired alternately by Paul Valéry and Gilbert Murray. Forster spoke (or rather delivered a written paper in French) on the theme of the special situation of the writer. The writer, he said, differed from other citizens in having a double duty: to promote the general welfare, but also to express his own personality.

It is not a plain straightforward opposition between art, a good thing, and government, an evil thing. It is rather an opposition between two cosmogonies, the spontaneous and the administrative, each with its rival conception of civilization, and at the moment the administrative is winning . . .

He found the *entretien* a very polite, very official French occasion and rather futile. The most burning question, the treatment of writers in totalitarian countries, was discreetly played down, and the one ripple of animation, amongst the gilt chairs and the tapestries of the Palais Royal, was a parochial French dispute over state aid for literature.¹

It was the time of the great Paris Exhibition, and Bob Buckingham came over to Paris to visit it with him. Forster had been invited by John Lehmann to report on it for *New Writing*, and in the resulting article, 'The Last Parade', he evoked, out of the neon-lights and fireworks of the Exhibition, a vision of the coming war – an aerial

¹ See 'A Conversation', *Spectator*, 13 August 1937, and *Le destin prochain des lettres* (League of Nations, Paris, 1938).

war of poison-gas and 'vesicant dew' – and of the approaching extinction of civilization.

O splendour unequalled! Splendour ever to be surpassed? Probably never to be surpassed. The German and Russian Pavilions, the Chinese and Japanese Pavilions, the British and Italian Pavilions, and all of the pavilions will see to that. The Eiffel Tower sings louder, a scientific swan. Rosy chemicals stimulate her spine, she can scarcely bear the voltage, the joy, the pain . . . The emotion goes to her tiny head, it turns crimson and vomits fiery serpents . . . the rockets fall, the senses disentangle. There is silence, there are various types of silences, and during one of them the Angel of the Laboratory speaks. 'Au revoir, mes enfants,' she says 'I hope you have enjoyed yourselves. We shall meet again shortly, and in different conditions.'

His vision had grown more despairing, and his hopes, such as they had ever been, of writers' congresses and declarations of 'commitment', had dwindled. When Rosamund Lehmann invited him to speak at one such occasion, he refused. 'These gatherings of worried writers,' he wrote (27 April 1938), 'serve, it seems to me, no further purpose than this showing where one stands. Neither the Government nor official Labour, nor any other organization with power behind it, will pay the least attention to them. Their only chance is to *do* something – instead of meeting one another and one another's hangers-on. And I don't know what they should do, or what I, as one of them should do. If I did I would come and say.' (When, in the Café Royal, on the eve of the Munich crisis, Goronwy Rees¹ challenged him, saying 'Why have you given up politics?' he replied, 'Because I want just a *little* result.')

In January 1938 Auden and Isherwood set off for China, to collect material for a book about the Sino-Japanese war. Forster and Bob Buckingham attended a sending-off party at the painter Julian Trevelyan's² house in Hammersmith. It was a large affair, stage-managed by Rupert Doone, and, for the occasion, Britten and Auden had composed songs for the cabaret-singer Hedli Andersen and Trevelyan had decorated his walls with *collage* pictures made from lumps of wool and frying-pans. Forster told Isherwood that he and Bob enjoyed it, 'though I believe it wasn't the general verdict and

¹ Morgan Goronwy Rees (1909–), then assistant editor of the *Spectator*.

² Julian Otto Trevelyan (1910–), son of R. C. Trevelyan.

the wine-cup vile and Rupert Doone an obvious crook' A few days before it, Isherwood had come on a visit to West Hackhurst and had talked about the China expedition in terms of the 'Test' and the need for the 'Truly Weak Man'¹ to prove himself Forster received this with cynicism, writing to Isherwood (17 February 1938) after his departure:

Bother the Test – am so certain I shall fail mine that I can't think about it. Now and then I get towards facing facts, but get too tired to keep on at it I only hope I shan't let any one down badly *that* thought does precise itself rather alarmingly.

However, if he had lost his trust in political gestures, he felt a growing desire to define his personal faith and philosophy He received a stimulus to do so from reading an 'Open Letter' to himself by Julian Bell,² written shortly before Bell's death in the Spanish civil war. Julian Bell's brief career had been significant both as a product of, and as a revolt against, Bloomsbury values. Brought up among pacifists and 'liberal humanists', he had reacted into a cult of 'hardness' and the military virtues, deserting from pacifism to his own brand of militant Fabianism.³ While at Cambridge in the early 1930s he had achieved some minor success as a poet, but he had fallen out with the prevailing poetic school of Auden, Day Lewis and Spender, and accused them of 'homosexual worker-worship' The Spanish civil war had come as a challenge to him. By the time that it broke out, he had been in China, teaching literature, but he had felt compelled to return and take part in the war; and on the boat-journey home, early in 1937, he had drawn up a general statement of his beliefs in the form of three 'Letters': to Roger Fry, C. Day Lewis and Forster. In the letter to Forster his argument – or a part of it – was that war was going to come anyway, 'and the terror, hate and enthusiasm of war, and the narrow-mindedness, the orthodoxy, the hatred of liberty and doubt'; so how one would face it was merely a choice of two evils. For himself, he would choose the military virtues:

¹ See Isherwood's autobiography *Lions and Shadows* (1938), chapter 2, for his theory of the 'Test'.

² Julian Bell (1908–37), eldest son of Clive and Vanessa Bell.

³ Characteristically, for the purposes of an anti-war demonstration in Cambridge on Armistice Day 1933, he converted his old Morris car into an 'armoured vehicle'.

This both because they alone will help us in practice, and because they offer us an attitude tolerably proof against disaster and emotion. The soldier's is not perhaps the best of lives for many people it may not offer a very great number of highly valued states of mind.¹ But it can be a good life, and is similar to the kind of good life I have described, as the saint's and enthusiast's is not: it is secular and rational

Julian Bell knew Forster and the letter was half affectionate in tone and half truculent. In a private letter to his brother Quentin he had written that his 'Letters' were meant to cause pain to intellectuals: 'thought if possible, but pain anyway It's no use persuading woollies and softies and c.p hysterics into being honourable and common-sense soldiers But it's just worth publishing my reflections for those who are capable, but want to lead'

Forster had liked Julian and had been upset by his death, but he considered him callow and muddle-headed, and he took the attack coolly The 'Letters' were published in a memorial volume,² edited by Julian's brother, and for this Forster composed some 'Notes for a Reply' What had been Julian's motive in the Letter, he speculated. Most likely, not to rebuke him, but simply to ride a hobby-horse: 'More an attitude than an ideology. And how can you argue with an attitude?' And what had Julian wanted him to do? Not to 'chuck gentleness', he supposed. At all events, he did not feel induced to do so. 'If one has been gentle, semi-idealistic, and semi-cynical, kind, tolerant, demure and, generally speaking a liberal for nearly sixty years, it is wiser to stick to one's outfit.'

Round about the same spring of 1938, he was invited by the *New York Nation* to contribute the first of a series entitled 'Living Philosophies'. He agreed, and the resulting article, originally called 'Two Cheers for Democracy' and later 'What I Believe', developed into a comprehensive statement of his beliefs. ('As for me, I am trying to construct a philosophy,' he wrote to Plomer, 9 January 1938.) It is an essay full of memorable sayings. It contains the famous '. . . if I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friends, I hope I should have the guts to betray my country.' Also:

¹ An allusion to G. E. Moore's ethical theories, so important to the Cambridge 'Apostles' of the previous generation.

² *Julian Bell. Essays, Poems and Letters*, ed. Q. Bell (1938).

The people I respect must behave as if they were immortal and as if society was eternal. Both assumptions are false both of them must be accepted as true if we are to go on eating and working and loving, and are to keep open a few breathing holes for the human spirit.

And:

I believe in aristocracy . . . Not an aristocracy of power, based upon rank and influence, but an aristocracy of the sensitive, the considerate and the plucky.

The essay, so deeply felt, and so disconcerting in its tactics, made a considerable impression. It annoyed many, both orthodox patriots and orthodox Marxists, but they felt outmanoeuvred by it. And many others, sickened of 'commitment' by the betrayals and confusions of the Spanish civil war, found it a great support and recognized a heroism in its facing of limitations. Philip Toynbee, reviewing it together with Spender's *The Trial of a Judge* and Rex Warner's *The Professor*, wrote that Forster was one of the very few members of the pre-First-World-War generation who had honestly confronted the limitations their period imposed on them 'He is a Liberal in every sense of the word and he has no illusions about the sad condition of Liberalism in the modern world. . . . Mr Forster's beliefs are very few and very simple, but all of them are denied and repudiated by the modern *Zeitgeist*.'¹

Forster had decided that, in his everyday life, his best attitude to the crisis in Europe was an 'alternation of fuss and calm'. ('Keeping calm and cheerful,' he told Florence Barger, 'is one of one's unshakeable functions.') He was planning no large work but did some reviewing and broadcasting and wrote the text of another village pageant, in aid of the Dorking and Leith Preservation Society. The pageant this time was entirely of his own devising. Its central idea was a parallel between the eighteenth-century Enclosures, which had robbed the peasantry of their common land, and the twentieth-century Death-duties, which, in theory, returned their land to them – in theory, but not in practice, for 'Squire Jeremiah', the 'improving' London landlord who had once despoiled 'Jack' and 'Jill', had been reincarnated as a property-developer, 'Jerry the Builder', to rob them all over again. Vaughan Williams, once again, had agreed to

¹ 'Too Good for This World', *Town Crier*, 9 December 1938.

provide the music, and the two had cheerful planning sessions, conducted amid gales of laughter. He had always liked and admired Vaughan Williams and would speak of him as a 'noble' man, though he thought him chuckle-headed – a 'goose' – in matters of judgement.¹

The pageant's sponsors included Dukes, Earls and the Lord Lieutenant of the County, but, to the general surprise, Lord Farrer refused to be a patron; indeed, he now actually resigned from the presidency of the Preservation Society. It suggested to Forster that his disputes with the Farrer family had not been forgotten; though, it also occurred to him, that it might merely be that the pageant, which featured the Labourers' Revolt of 1830, was too 'Bolshie' for Lord Farrer. Whiffs of local gossip reached him, about resentment against the pageant-organizers in the village. He told Bob Buckingham (4 July 1938): 'It has opened my eyes a little to the suspicions and jealousies which are moving everywhere beneath the social surface.'

He did some of the writing of the pageant at Dover. It was to be the last of his Dover visits, for Joe Ackereley's activities had finally been too much for the 'Holy Ladies'. They had asked him to leave; and Forster, in the circumstances, felt obliged to leave with him, reporting to Sprott that 'Dover is, alas, henceforward a Closed Port.' Ackereley felt compunctious on Forster's behalf, but Forster told him not to worry on this score. 'But what does concern me is that you won't face up to the fact that, to the average person, this sort of thing is disgusting, especially when it obtrudes its creaks and sheets end first upon their notice.'

Isherwood came back to London in August, via New York, and was working on his part of *Journey to a War*. As a result of the Spanish Civil war, and its failures and betrayals, he and Auden were both in reaction against their earlier political attitudes. They had gone to China less in an ideological frame of mind than to prepare themselves imaginatively for the coming European war*; and in China, Auden had begun to turn against the belief that poetry could have political effect or could be an agent in history. On their journey,

¹ A friend of mine, O. W. Neighbour, remembers talking to Forster about Vaughan Williams and the comic vehemence and violent shaking of the head with which Forster said: 'If he [Vaughan Williams] got an idea in his head, you – could – not get it out!'

he and Isherwood argued sometimes about religion. Isherwood denied so violently that he possessed a soul that Auden, would tell him, teasingly, that he must be on the brink of a conversion; and at this Isherwood would invoke Forster, saying that Morgan Forster was incapable of having truck with 'such Fascist filth'.¹ Auden was in a new mood of quasi-religious pessimism, and to him, too, the figure of Forster, so unpolitical yet 'committed', appeared now in an exemplary light. He composed a sonnet to him, which became the dedication of the book. It ran:

TO E. M. FORSTER

Though Italy and King's are far away,
And Truth a subject only bombs discuss,
Our ears unfriendly, still you speak to us,
Insisting that the inner life can pay.

As we dash down the slope of hate with gladness,
You trip us up like an unnoticed stone,
And, just when we are closeted with madness,
You interrupt us like the telephone.

Yes, we are Lucy, Turton, Philip: we
Wish international evil, are delighted
To join the jolly ranks of the benighted

Where reason is denied and love ignored,
But, as we swear our lie, Miss Avery . . .
Comes out into the garden with the sword.²

The concluding verse-sequence of *Journey to a War* was also unmistakably Forsterian, speaking of the need for the heart to be made 'awkward and alive':

¹ Isherwood writes in *Christopher and his Kind* 'I wonder, now, if Wystan then believed what he stated in a letter to Christopher many years later in explanation of Forster's declared agnosticism. "As I see him, Morgan is a person who is so accustomed to the Presence of God that he is unaware of it; he has never known what it feels like when the Presence is withdrawn."'

² See *Howards End*, chapter 41:

They laid Leonard, who was dead, on the gravel, Helen poured water over him.

'That's enough,' said Charles.

'Yes, murder's enough,' said Miss Avery, coming out of the house with the sword.

Ruffle the perfect manners of the frozen heart,
And once again compel it to be awkward and alive,
To all it suffered once a weeping witness.

Clear from the head the masses of impressive rubbish;
Rally the lost and trembling forces of the will . . .

Forster particularly admired these poems of Auden's in *Journey to a War*. Later he wrote of Auden: 'He elicits a response which I cannot always explain. Because he once wrote "We must love one another or die", he can command me to follow him.'¹ He also once said that Auden's 'In Memory of Sigmund Freud' was the best poem ever written.

As for Isherwood, he had returned to England in a mood of confusion and self-disgust. The truth was, as he related later, he had totally lost his political faith. The 'line' he had to take in the China book – 'united front', resistance to the Japanese, etc – had lost all meaning for him and had become mere slogans. He confided to his diary bitterly (31 August 1938): 'And yet I still slip into the slogan-language when I write, and I talk it quite shamelessly on the lecture-platform, where I strut mock-modestly, playing the hero for the benefit of anyone attractive who may happen to be in the audience.' He felt poisoned by his crisis-fears, compulsively buying ten newspapers a day, but feeling, under all his various moods, a 'cold rock-bottom resentment': 'I resent being forced by the crisis to read the newspapers: they are *always* trash, no matter what they have to report.'² When he heard that Chamberlain had flown to Berchtesgaden and a friend said that England would lose prestige by this, he said to himself: 'What do I care? At least the showdown is postponed.' By now moreover he, like Auden, had privately decided to migrate to America.

Forster took Isherwood out to lunch during the Munich crisis, telling Bob Buckingham afterwards (26 September 1938); 'Cheered poor Christopher a bit: war is particularly awful for him, owing to Heinz being on the other side. I think he would rather kill himself than kill a German.' He told Isherwood he was afraid of going mad – of suddenly turning and running away from people in the street. 'But,

¹Ironically, by the time that he came to write this, in a review of *The Enchafed Flood* in 1951, Auden had grown embarrassed by the line and had jettisoned it.

² *Down There on a Visit* (1962), p. 176.

actually,' Isherwood wrote in his diary, 'he's the last person who'd ever go mad, he's far saner than anyone else I know. And immensely, superhumanly strong. He's strong because he doesn't try to be a stiff-lipped stoic, like the rest of us; and so he'll never crack. He's absolutely flexible. He lives by love, not by will.'¹ While they were eating, the manager came over to tell them he had just heard on the radio that Hitler had allowed six days for the evacuation of the Sudeten areas. It seemed to Isherwood an almost indefinite reprieve, and he ordered champagne, which set Forster off making silly and charming jokes. More and more, in Isherwood's eyes, as in those of a few others who knew him closely, Forster grew into a symbol and a hero. 'When the newspapers compare Chamberlain to Abe Lincoln and Jesus Christ,' wrote Isherwood in his diary, 'they aren't being in the least sacrilegious; because *their* Lincoln and *their* Christ are utter phonies, anyhow. The newspapers are moved to tears by the spectacle of a gentleman standing his ground against a non-gentleman. So they call him 'England'

Well – *my* 'England' is E.M., the anti-heroic hero, with his straggly straw moustache, his light gay blue baby-eyes and his elderly stoop. Instead of a folded umbrella or a brown uniform, his emblems are his tweed cap (which is too small for him) and the odd-shaped brown paper parcels in which he carries his belongings from country to town and back again. While the others tell their followers to be ready to die, he advises us to live as if we were immortal. And he really does this himself, although he is as anxious and afraid as any of us, and never for an instant pretends not to be. He and his books and what they stand for are all that is truly worth saving from Hitler; and the vast majority of people on this island aren't even aware that he exists.²

¹ *Down There on a Visit* (1962), p. 192.

² *Ibid.*, p. 177.

10 A Visit to Ferney

The Munich pact made Forster ashamed for his country. Life in the months after it seemed to him to have a new character, confused, ambiguous and ignoble. 'This post-Munich world may not last long,' he wrote in an article, 'The 1939 State', in the *New Statesman*.¹

We have to make the best of an unexplored and equivocal state, and we are more likely to succeed if we give up any hope of simplicity. 'Prepare, prepare!' does not do for a slogan. No more does 'Business as usual' Both of them are untrue to the spirit of 1939, the spirit which is half-afraid and half-thinking about something else . . . the imperfect and blemished lamb, as he stands at the foot of the altar, is partly atremble because of the on-coming knife, and partly thinking of other things.

The dilemma facing his country, so it seemed to him, was that to defeat totalitarianism it would have to become totalitarian itself. By now he feared Communist totalitarianism as well as the Nazi kind. In a letter (30 October 1938) to C. Day Lewis, who had dedicated *Overtures to Death* to him, he wrote that the poems offered the possibility of heroic action and that many would be satisfied with that, but not Lewis or himself.

. . . since I spoke up for Communism in Paris three years ago, I have had disillusionments which don't altogether proceed from my own weaknesses. Russia, perhaps from no fault of her own, seems to be going in the wrong direction, too much conformity and too much bloodshed. Perhaps – and perhaps under another name – Communism will restart life after the next European

¹ *New Statesman and Nation*, 10 June 1939 It was reprinted in *Two Cheers for Democracy* as 'Post-Munich'.

catastrophe and do better. Indeed a vision sometimes comes to me that it will start again and again, always more strongly, and in the end be too strong for catastrophes. But that won't be in our time, nor perhaps in Europe's. If *that* is the way I think my own job is to fall out and die by the way side.

For the immediate future, Forster foresaw an era of censorship and suppression of liberty, the history of which, when some satirist came to write it, would be entitled 'They Hold Their Tongues'.¹ It renewed his sense of the importance of the N.C.C.L., and he once more became active on its executive committee. The issue most concerning the N.C.C.L. just now was the Official Secrets Act of 1920, and especially its Clause 6, which made it the duty of a citizen to supply, on demand, information relating to breaches of official secrecy. There had been discussion of the Act in Parliament during 1938. The Act was ostensibly aimed at spies, but recently there had been a tendency to use it more widely, and it had been invoked by the police against a journalist, in connection with a 'wanted' man,² and by the Attorney-General when Duncan Sandys had asked permission to put a question in the House about London's anti-aircraft defences. The Sandys case had aroused violent controversy, leading to an investigation by a Select Committee, and the N.C.C.L. and the National Union of Journalists had launched a joint campaign for amendments to the law. A deputation to the Home Secretary, Sir Samuel Hoare,³ was arranged during December, and Forster went as one of the two N.C.C.L. representatives. He took against Hoare, who struck him as civil but shifty, and he wrote an article for the *New Statesman*⁴ about the interview, in which he analysed the technique of the ministerial snub:

They carry on like this: begin a sentence deeply, gruffly, gently, it moves along like a large friendly animal: then it twitters, turns acid and thin and passes right overhead with a sort of whistling sound.

The agitation had some effect, for next year the Government brought in a bill to amend Clause 6, restricting its use to cases of espionage.

¹ 'They Hold Their Tongues'; *New Statesman and Nation*, 30 September 1938.

² *Rex v. Cattle*. Cattle was convicted under Clause 6.

³ Samuel John Gurney Hoare, 1st Viscount Templewood (1880-1959), joint author of the much-vilified Hoare-Laval pact over Abyssinia in 1935.

⁴ 'Comment and Dream: On a Deputation'; *New Statesman and Nation*, 14 January 1939.

Being a prominent figure in all civil liberties matters, he was invited early in the following year to serve on a Lord Chancellor's committee on the laws of libel. He was still smarting over 'A Flood in the Office' and accepted with enthusiasm, getting the P.E.N. Club to brief him with case-histories of fellow-writers victimized under the present laws. The Committee, under the chairmanship of Lord Porter,¹ sat for several years, being reconvened after the war, and its report eventually helped to secure some protection to authors in cases of inadvertent libel. Forster attended regularly, and at the session on 27 July 1939 he led the examination of witnesses. It was the day when the Society of Authors, represented by Ernest Raymond, Alec Waugh and the Society's Secretary, Kilham Roberts, was giving evidence. Forster extracted a declaration from Kilham Roberts that 'the libel law had murdered, or killed, a great many books' and from Ernest Raymond that the law 'tended if not to dry up the springs of creation, at least to dilute them'. He then proceeded to describe his own experience over the Lawrence letters, presenting it as an instance where the libel law had stopped a book from being written. Finally, he brought up the theory, often heard, that in cases of inadvertent libel 'the author hardly ever pays'. It was, he said, quite false; and he related the story of 'A Flood in the Office'² and various other incidents, some quite recent, when innocent authors had had to pay heavy libel damages.

* * *

In January 1939 Isherwood and Auden had emigrated to America. They had briefly shared a flat in New York; then in May Isherwood had moved on to California, partly in order to discuss pacifism, and his own situation in case of a war, with Gerald Heard. (Like many of his friends he revered Heard as a mentor and sage.) He was in a mood of confusion and self-doubt, wondering if he had made a mistake in deserting England, and he wrote asking Forster for his opinion – telling him how much he learned from him in the past. Forster replied (14 May 1939) that he wondered he should have taught him anything:

¹ Samuel Lowry Porter (1877–1956), Lord of Appeal 1938–54.

² See p. 211.

. but it is quite true that I don't hate a lot, if that is at all exemplary. It is partly idleness, partly an attempt to avoid being hated, but partly an impulse towards love . . .

But what are you to do dear Christopher? I don't see, after what happened to Heinz that you can help hating, and I hope G. Heard won't try to persuade you out of it. If you can come to love in your own way that's all right of course. But don't feel worried at being bitter

I have still not told dear Christopher what he is to do. Well I in your shoes would not return to England unless the social scene normalizes

For his own part, as the crisis in Europe prolonged itself, Forster felt it absurd to pretend any longer to measure up to it – to 'echo its crescendo with a personal one'. It was better, he decided, to try to keep in temper, even if it meant not 'facing reality', and to provision one's soul against the coming war. In this spirit he went in June to join Charles Mauron in Geneva, to see the exhibition of paintings from the Prado museum. In both their minds it was a sort of farewell to civilized enjoyments; and for Mauron it was a farewell in another sense too, for he was on the verge of total blindness. In this valedictory mood they paid a visit to Voltaire's Ferney. The chateau was not open to visitors, but they peered in through the fence and got a view of it and of the chapel, with its tablet 'Deo erexit VOLTAIRE' – the lettering of 'VOLTAIRE', they were pleased to notice, being twice the size of the Deity's. What the place seemed to say to Forster was 'Civilization, Humanity, Enjoyment'. As Mauron and he peered, they clung to the bars of the fence, and, when he wrote about it later,¹ he had a vision of them as monkeys, soon to return to separate and locked cages.

'I am content to have seen Ferney,' remarked Charles, as he dusted his paws I popped the object into my pouch for future use. One never knows, and I had no idea how precious it would become to me in a year's time, nor how I should take it out, and discover that it has turned faintly radioactive.

* * *

The outbreak of war in September 1939 left him calm though pessimistic, convinced that Britain would be defeated. His mother

¹ 'Happy Ending', *New Statesman and Nation*, 2 November 1940; reprinted in *Two Cheers for Democracy* as 'Ferney'.

took it well; she was keyed up but not painfully so. However, he wished she were out of it, and he looked forward gloomily to the prospect of his own imprisonment in Abinger. Bob Buckingham had persuaded him to give up his Bloomsbury flat and to take one nearer to himself and had found him one in Chiswick (9 Arlington Park Mansions). Nevertheless Forster imagined that, as soon as air-raids began, London would be closed to him; and even were it not, Bob Buckingham would be busy day and night. Thinking thus, a day or two before war broke out, he bade Bob a farewell. 'Bob twice k'd me on Waterloo entrance No. 3 platform, 8 p.m., then walked away firmly, his broad shoulders in bluish sports coat last seen by me.'

In Abinger, he told John Simpson, he prepared himself for 'comforting my mother through bottling fruit and Armageddon.' His cousin Percy Whichelo and Percy's wife Dutchie, had come to live at West Hackhurst, supposedly for the duration. Percy, who had shared a tutor with Forster fifty years before,¹ was a retired official of the Ecclesiastical Commission: rather pompous and touchy and a great writer to the newspapers. His and Dutchie's stay was not a success. 'Dutchie is upset,' Forster wrote to Bob Buckingham, soon after their arrival, 'because mother has contradicted her about some lion cubs. Percy because he has been spoken to too sharply about an apron.' They left in dudgeon in November, and were replaced by Forster's Uncle Philip, now very old and frail, and by Lily's old friend Mrs Mawe. At first, matters did not go very well with Mrs Mawe either. Lily was fond of her, but the two often exasperated each other. 'At times, much as I love Mrs Mawe, I could tear her to ribbons and use a chopper besides,' wrote Lily once, in her slashing manner. 'She tosses erroneous statements in the air like an aimless cow.' Tempers grew frayed, Mrs Mawe left, and her daughter Elaine wrote rebuking Lily. The letter delighted Lily, Forster told Ackerley, 'because Elaine has told her of the misfortunes of Bunny, her daughter and made her feel important,' and as a result peace was made and Mrs Mawe returned. A little later, in September 1940, Florence Barger was bombed out of her house in Hampstead and came to join them. It was an intensely old-fashioned household. They still had no telephone, nor electric light. There were not even any baths, so that Agnes, old and bent double with rheumatism, still had to carry hot

¹ See Vol. I, p. 30.

water up to bedrooms in heavy brass cans; in her cap, apron and streamers she was, friends said, 'the last parlourmaid in England.' Lily herself, born in 1855, was by now an old woman and in continual pain from rheumatism – so much so that she stood rather than sat whenever possible and would write her letters standing. More and more she refused to spend money on herself, and day in and day out, she would wear the same ancient grey coat, full of holes.

During these early war months, Forster busied himself with journalism. In November 1939 he wrote a review of Jan Struther's *Mrs Miniver*,¹ a novel glorifying the whimsical humour and heroism of the English upper middle classes. It was a very funny and deflating review – concluding on a more sober note that national characters, English or otherwise, were not likely to be of much importance in the future, though 'they have a factitious value, especially in wartime, because they are exploited by rival governmental gangs.' The review annoyed his friend Hilton Young (now, Lord Kennet) who wrote that it was untimely and unpatriotic. 'I am against criticism,' he told Forster. 'In our race and society and time it is the besetting sin.' Forster retorted with some friendly digs at Kennet's own way of life and outlook, and this brought from Kennet an enormous letter, expounding his own Tory philosophy, and defending his decision, now that he was on the shelf politically,² to devote himself not to literature but to money-making. Forster, impressed, replied (15 February 1940) with an *apologia* almost as long:

. . . you do believe that a society which encourages money-making is good, and that good men should try to make money in it, and you have faith (which I don't share) that the Youngs rather than the Kysants³ will come on top. Your other motives I follow pretty well, and some of them I even imitate. I too want to be comfortable when I'm old, and to keep up my little family tradition – though I don't believe that the present fabric of society is going to survive. I love my books as dearly as you can

¹ 'The Top Drawer But One'; *New Statesman and Nation*, 4 November 1939. It was reprinted in *Two Cheers for Democracy* as 'Mrs. Miniver'.

² He was Minister of Health in Ramsay MacDonald's second National Government (1931–5), thereafter losing office and being relegated to the House of Lords.

³ In 1931, in a case of much notoriety, Lord Kysant, a well-known shipping magnate, was sent to prison for publishing a fraudulent company prospectus.

love yours, but it is typical of us that when you should stick in armorial bookplates I should only write in mine 'E. M. Forster, at West Hackhurst' I don't feel of any where. I wish I did. It is not that I am *déraciné*. It is that the soil is being washed away.

. . . I suppose you feel you can serve, fulfil, nourish yourself better by making a large income – I use these words in a sort of 16th century Renaissance sense of course, and I felt while reading your letter that you belonged to the Renaissance

. . . The parts of Communism and of Christianity that interest me are *not* their boring egalitarianisms, but their attempts to cut out money. I do think money is dangerous, and I know more about its dangers than you suppose, for my great grandfather was quite a famous banker, and some of his canniness runs in my blood, and tempts me to prefer money to the things it buys.

. . . I cling to criticism, much as you cling to that still mistier abstraction, justice . . . Why should you think that just *now* dumb obedience is best? It might be if we were sure it wasn't the Kysants who were giving the orders

* * *

For Forster there was no doubt that anti-semitism was the worst and most shocking of all things. It was the one evil, as he wrote,¹ that no one had foreseen at the end of the First World War, and it dominated his attitude to the present one, making it impossible for him to be a pacifist. He detected Jew-consciousness in the air even in England. 'A nasty side of our nation's character has been scratched up – the sniggering side,' he wrote. 'People who would not ill-treat Jews themselves, or even be rude to them, enjoy tittering over their misfortunes.' When, in May of this year, he heard that a young policeman friend of his and Bob's had been talking anti-semitism, he at once despatched him a stinging letter. He wrote that he was surprised that E— of all people should be anti-Jewish, pointed out the evil effect of such opinions, and ended with a list of the names of great Jews. E— was hurt; for in fact the rumour had been unfair – he had merely remarked that it was a pity certain Jews had involved themselves just now in an insurance scandal, at the moment when their race was in such peril. He complained to Harry Daley, and Daley, attributing the rumour to Bob Buckingham, wrote Forster a furious and violent letter, telling him his rebuke to E— had been impertinent, and blaming him for betraying his working-class

¹ 'Jew-consciousness', *New Statesman*, 7 January 1939, reprinted in *Two Cheers for Democracy*.

admirers by deserting pacifism. It was the last letter to pass between the two, and Daley was later ashamed of it. Forster did not reply and now finally wiped Harry off the list of his friends.*

Isherwood wrote often from California. He had become a declared pacifist, and, under the influence of Heard and Heard's *guru*, the Vedantist monk Prabhavananda, he had begun a conversion to Hindu mystical beliefs (As he grew firmer in his beliefs, he attempted to explain them in his letters to Forster but received a discouraging response, Forster said he 'couldn't imagine' the belief that God could help him.) Even before the war, in the English press, there had been sporadic attacks on Isherwood and his fellow-exiles but Forster had advised ignoring them. 'I very much hope that you and everyone will try to keep away,' he wrote to Isherwood (10 July 1939), '- it is clearly your job to see us sink from a distance, if sink we do.' The attacks had continued, and during the spring of 1940 they swelled into a chorus Cyril Connolly, in the second number of *Horizon* (February 1940) gave cynical praise to Isherwood and his friends for their opportunism in deserting 'the sinking ship of European democracy'. And in an article in the *Spectator* for 19 April Harold Nicolson speculated as to why Auden, Isherwood, Heard and Aldous Huxley should have 'retired within the ivory tower':

These men have been my friends. For nearly a quarter of a century I have admired Aldous Huxley as one of the most intelligent of our authors and as a man who possesses a brilliant, inquisitive and enfranchised mind. I have looked on Gerald Heard as the most delightful of companions and as one of the most saintly men that I have known, I have seen Wystan Auden playing upon the Malvern Hills, and Christopher Isherwood shyly and slyly observing human behaviour from a retired seat in a Berlin café. Huxley has exercised, and still exercises, a great influence upon my own and the succeeding generation; Heard has brought novelties of science within the scope of the ordinary man; W. H. Auden is rightly regarded as among the most gifted of our younger poets; and with Isherwood rests, to my mind, the future of the English novel. Why should these four eminent Georgians have flown? . . .

It is not so much that the absence of these four men from Europe will cause us to lose the Second German War. It is that their presence in the United States may lead American opinion, which is all too prone to doubt the righteousness of our cause, to find comfort in their company . . . How can we proclaim over

there that we are fighting for the liberated mind, when four of our most liberated intellectuals refuse to identify themselves either with those who fight or with those who oppose the battle?

On 13 June 1940 a question was asked in Parliament about Auden and Isherwood and their situation as regards war-service,* and next day the *Spectator* printed a vicious epigram, signed 'W.R.M.', addressed 'To Certain Intellectuals Safe in America':

'This Europe stinks', you cried – swift to desert
Your stricken country in her sore distress.
You may not care, but still I will assert,
Since you have left us, here the stink is less.¹

Forster, already irritated by Harold Nicolson's article, countered this epigram with a letter² which carried the war into the opposing camp.

THESE 'LOST LEADERS'

Sir, W.R.M.'s epigram in your issue of June 21st impels me to ask whether there could not now be a close time for snarling at absent intellectuals. About half a dozen of them – not more – are away in America, and week after week their fellow-authors go for them in the newspapers. The attacks are highly moral and patriotic in tone, but their continuance raises the uneasy feeling that there must be something else behind them, namely, unconscious envy; they are like the snarl of an unfortunate schoolboy who has been 'kept in' and is aggrieved because the whole of his class has not been kept in too, and therefore complains and complains about those stinkers out in the playground instead of concentrating on his own inescapable task.

And there is a further objection to this undignified nagging: it diverts public attention from certain Englishmen who really are a danger to the country. They too, are few in number – perhaps again not more than half a dozen – but they have influence, wealth and position, which intellectuals have not, and they shelter not in the United States, but in the City and the aristocracy. Our literary lampoonists can here find a foe worthier of their powers. Let them leave their absent colleagues alone for the next fortnight, and denounce our resident Quislings instead. The consequences may be unpleasant to them, for Quislings sometimes hit back. But they will have had the satisfaction of exposing a genuine menace instead of a faked one, and this should be sufficient reward.

¹ Forster, writing to John Simpson (10 July 1940) said he had heard that 'W.R.M.' was W. R. Matthews, the Dean of St Paul's

² *Spectator*, 5 July 1940.

He told John Simpson (10 July 1940) that he would have liked to defend his friends but thought attack the better tactic

* * *

Bob Buckingham, till now a pacifist, was beginning to waver in his views, deciding that should the police be armed to fight invaders he would fight with them, though if he were called up he would try to choose some non-combatant service. He was having a tough and heroic time on duty in the London blitz. In a way he was enjoying it. 'I just couldn't bear to be away from London as things are,' he wrote to Forster (in September or thereabouts) 'I don't think it is anything to do with courage at all, rather I feel that the Police are really doing a fine job and I at least get a wonderful feeling of having accomplished something which was worth doing, and of course it is exciting.' He was bitter against the amateurism of the air-raid rescue services and wanted something done to 'pull down this curtain of sham heroism' which the newspapers put round them. Forster asked Bob to let him know of any special cases of need among the air-raid victims. He was curious to see the devastation, and got Bob to take him a tour of the blitzed areas. His main reaction, however, was a sort of chagrin at not feeling more. After the great raid on the docks, on 7 September 1940, he noted cheerlessly in his diary:

Sept. 8 London Burning! I watched this event from my Chiswick flat last night with disgust and indignation, but with no intensity though the spectacle was superb. I thought 'It is nothing like the burning of Troy.' Yet the Surrey Docks were ablaze at the back with towers and spires outlined against them, greenish yellow searchlights swept the sky in futile agony, crimson shells burst behind the spire of Turnham Green church. This is all that a world catastrophe amounts to. Something which one is too sad and sullen to appreciate.

* * *

Believing, as he had told Hilton Young, that 'criticism' should be his public function, Forster kept a close eye on the B.B.C. He had made quite a study of the B.B.C. and its tactics in imposing itself as 'the voice of the Nation', and, remembering the odious behaviour of the press during the 1914-18 war, he distrusted its wartime influence. He had many friends in it, including George Barnes, shortly to become head of the Talks department. Thus he was kept well

informed about developments; and during the course of the war he had several victorious brushes with the B.B.C. One was over the treatment given to literature in its programmes. It had struck him that, since the war began, almost no time at all was given to literature – at most five hours a week out of a hundred and fifteen on the Home Service, and none at all on the Forces programme. He spoke privately to George Barnes on the subject with no result; then, later in 1940, he was invited by a Talks producer, C. V. Salmon, to appear in a series of interviews with writers. This gave him the chance for his protest. 'I think the suggested series would have been very suitable,' he replied, 'if the B.B.C.'s attitude to literature had been different':

But what has *it* done of recent years to bring the public into relation with writers either dead or alive? What attempt has it made to treat our national heritage in letters seriously? With its miserable record, I don't think it's in a position to invite authors to chat!

I am sure that individual officials and probably individual directors too, think English literature a valuable national asset. And they control an organization which is exempted from the financial anxieties which vex the ordinary publisher, and which can address the public, on one wavelength alone, for over a hundred hours a week. They have convictions and they have power, and my God look at their performance.

If the performance had been different, it would have been fun to discuss who could be compared at the microphone and how. As it is, I feel it is too wry a jest.

The B.B.C. took notice of this and, in March 1941, convened a meeting to discuss the matter, to which Forster led a delegation from the Society of Authors. His intervention bore fruit, and various literary features were thereupon introduced into the wartime programmes.

By now Forster was a very frequent broadcaster. Soon after the outbreak of war Malcolm Darling had resigned from the Indian Civil Service to take charge of broadcasting to India,¹ and as one of his first actions at the B.B.C. he had engaged Forster to give regular weekly or fortnightly talks to India. Forster talked mainly about books; and, reflecting that Indians would have had English literature stuffed down their throats, he devoted as much time as he could to

¹ Darling was knighted in 1939.

continental literature. With intervals he continued to deliver these talks throughout the rest of the war and for a year or two after it.

He had, thus, become a valuable property to the B.B.C. And when in March 1941 he was involved in a serious clash with the Corporation, he put his position to use. The dispute was over governmental interference in broadcasting. At the beginning of the war, the B.B.C. had divested itself of most of its governing body, in the name of increased efficiency. The dismissed governors were said to have approved of their dismissal (though one of them, H. A. L. Fisher, wrote to the newspapers denying it), and more recently the B.B.C. had accepted, in their place, two governmental 'advisers', of dubious status and powers. Now, this March, it became known that the B.B.C. was blacklisting performers (and in one case a composer, Alan Bush) because of their political activities. Specifically, they were being banned if they belonged to the 'People's Convention' – a Communist-run body, founded the previous year, which was campaigning for friendship with the Soviet Union and a 'People's Peace'. Questions about the ban were asked in the House of Commons, and the Minister of Information, Duff Cooper, defended it, asserting that to be employed by the B.B.C. was a 'privilege' and not a right, and that artistes who took part in public agitations could not expect to receive this 'great privilege'. From this it seemed plain the Government had had a hand in the blacklisting, and the N.C.C.L. (many of whose members belonged to the People's Convention) launched a protest campaign, attacking the whole relationship of Government to broadcasting. A mass meeting was staged for 17 March, at the Conway Hall in Bloomsbury, and Forster was one of the main speakers.¹ 'Who is responsible for this dastardly attack upon our democracy?' he asked.

One's first impression was that it must be the officials of the B.B.C., and this was the nimble idea of G. B. Shaw.²

But it is most unlikely that the Director General of the B.B.C.³ could have been responsible, because he is a man of integrity and he came from Belfast with a great reputation for moral courage.

¹ Among the other speakers were Beatrix Lehmann, Michael Redgrave and the Archdeacon of Westminster, Canon Donaldson.

² A message from Shaw was received at the meeting, saying that the whole managing staff of the B.B.C. should be sacked instantly.

³ Sir Frederick Ogilvie (1893–1949), Reith's successor as Director-General.

E. M. Forster: A Life

The two Government officials are more sinister – Sir Alan Powell, who was a Conservative ex-Mayor of Kensington, and Captain Millis. They are probably not indeed the initiators but the willing agents

The true villain, he suggested, was Duff Cooper.

There is an extraordinary priggishness and fatuousness in his saying that it is a privilege to the artist to come to the microphone. I would rather say that it is a privilege to us to listen to these artists. Mr Duff Cooper has got it all upside down. Logic indeed is not his strong point. He told us in the past that we were not to talk and then he organized questioners to find out what we were saying.

He and his friends, Forster said, were not asking for much. They were not asking for freedom of speech at the microphone, but freedom of speech away from the microphone, and if what they did there was illegal, that was a matter for the courts to decide, and not the Ministry of Information or the B B C

In making this protest I think we should be chiefly concerned for the smaller people. Because when important people are thrown overboard they make a big splash. We all rush to the edge and say 'my goodness we must make a row'. The whole affair is brought up to the front. But the smaller people don't make a splash; they vanish silently and the injustice never comes to light

He read out a letter from Vaughan Williams to the B.B.C., protesting against the victimization of Alan Bush and withdrawing permission for one of his own works to be performed on the air. Forster said he was following this 'magnificent lead' and was withdrawing his labour also.

It was an effective campaign. Three days later, Churchill promised in the House that the ban should be removed, and twelve days after that Duff Cooper announced the reconstitution of the B.B.C.'s Board of Governors. Asked whether 'in the reasonable restrictions of war, this enlightened Board of Governors would be allowed to exercise genuine freedom', he replied, 'Yes, certainly.'

The cry was growing louder that the N.C.C.L. was Communist-run, and Forster found himself fighting a double battle, defending the N.C.C.L. to the world outside and combating Communist influence within it. A little before the B.B.C. affair, the Council had run a campaign for freedom of the press, prompted partly by the

banning of the *Daily Worker*.¹ It had called a conference, and on the eve of this, Forster received various telegrams from Communists, challenging him to make a public stand in favour of the *Daily Worker*. Despite this, when helping to frame the conference resolution, he did his best, as he told Sprott (2 February 1941), 'to find a formula for protest which should give the Communists no pleasure.'

The Communist issue was involving him in some awkward publicity. The N.C.C.L. had convened a conference to consider, among other questions, the position of the trade unions under war-time legislation, and the National Council of Labour had issued a circular denying the N.C.C.L.'s right to interfere in trade union affairs. The matter had come up at the Labour Party's annual conference, and A. M. Wall, Secretary of the London Society of Compositors, had attacked the N.C.C.L., saying that 'some of us know quite well that the National Council for Civil Liberties is not entirely removed from the Communist Solar System, and for the last few months has been almost mainly under its control' The N.C.C.L. responded with a letter to the press, signed by Forster among others, denying Wall's charges 'categorically' It appeared, among other places, in *Time and Tide* on 21 June 1941, and 'Four Winds' (most probably the editor, Lady Rhondda) commented in his Diary, in the same issue:

The little quarrel which is proceeding between the N.C.C.L. and Mr A. M. Wall, Secretary of the London Society of Compositors, who before he held his present office was for 12 years Secretary of the London Trades Council, is an entertaining one. Presidents are chosen for their probity, but probity can sometimes go with some degree of innocence. Men of the calibre of Mr H. W. Nevins² and Mr E. M. Forster would never knowingly sign anything false, but unless they make their presidential work a whole-time job they might not always know what is true. I am bound to say that I would sooner trust to Mr A. M. Wall's knowledge than that of Mr H. W. Nevins in a matter of this kind. I had myself already noticed two odd things about the N.C.C.L.. (a) that it appears to be totally unaware that there is a war in progress; (b) that all the

¹ The *Daily Worker* was suppressed on 21 January 1941, under Regulation 2D of the Defence Regulations, on the grounds of its 'systematic publication of matter calculated to foment opposition to the prosecution of the war to a successful conclusion'.

² Nevins was now president of the N.C.C.L.

same a number of its recent activities have been calculated to hinder rather than to help the war effort.

Forster and Kidd replied separately in the following week's issue, Forster's letter running:

Sir,

In your issue of June 21st you imply that I am not a Communist. That is correct. And my general attitude towards this war is probably more or less your own: it is set out in a pamphlet called *Nordic Twilight*.

But in the same issue you imply that the N.C.C.L., an organization of which I was once president and on whose platform I have lately spoken, is mainly Communist-controlled, and that I have been tricked into supporting it.

By whom have I been tricked?

By our secretary, Mr Ronald Kidd, who invited me to join it about ten years ago? And if not by him, then by whom have Mr Kidd and I both been tricked? Would you please give the name?

Time and Tide commented in its leader that it would not have chosen this week, when Russia had just entered the war on the Allied side, to pursue the matter of the N.C.C.L.; but 'a challenge has been made. It must be answered. Mr E. M. Forster has asked a straight question. And Mr Kidd protests too much to be ignored.'

Mr Forster has asked us who has tricked him. The answer lies not in one name but in a whole system.

We would, in our turn, ask Mr Forster three questions.

(1) Does he know how many Communists there are on the Executive Committee of the National Council for Civil Liberties?

(2) Has he got particulars as to how many of these are publicly known as Communists, and how many are secret members of the Communist Party?

(3) Can he deny that at a meeting of the Executive Committee of the N.C.C.L. held last February, two leading members were obliged to protest against the Communist trend of a policy suggested?¹

Forster replied that to speak vaguely of 'a whole system' was no answer to his question and to this the editor rejoined with further remarks about the 'system': it was, she said, the system known as

¹ It is conceivable that *Time and Tide*'s informant was Kingsley Martin, who tended to blow hot and cold towards the N.C.C.L.

'white-anting', by which 'a determined and energetic minority uses the broadly humanitarian objects of recognized societies as a cover for its own political ends' In the same issue (5 July 1941), Rebecca West wrote, describing the mental state of the N.C.C.L. as 'dewy, cloistered, nun-like'. She herself, she wrote, had been a Vice-President but had resigned the previous year in protest against the Council's campaign – run purely for Communist ends, so it seemed to her – over conditions in French internment camps. The Council, she said, had seemed quite astonished by her resignation, and by the suggestion that they were under Communist control.

They treated the allegation as if it was sheer perversity on my part, a quaint and ugly fancy. Their best friends had, apparently, never told them.

With such simplicity it is not for us to argue. I will offer no prize for a delineation of the Committee as I have seen it in my mind's eye ever since. I will say that I hope none will doubt that I ever suspected the integrity of Mr Nevinson or Mr Forster, who seem to me two of the most distinguished and also lovable Englishmen we have looked on in our time. But I was not prepared to find the whole society cut of the same cloth, white samite, mystic, wonderful . . .

For the moment Forster did not let himself be swayed by these attacks, and in the following year, on the death of H. W. Nevinson, he briefly resumed the Presidency.

* * *

In 1943 the influential American critic Lionel Trilling published a book on Forster. It made large and persuasive claims for him. Forster, he said, was for him 'the only living novelist who can be read again and again and who, after each reading, gives me what few writers can give us after our first days of novel-reading, the sensation of having learned something.' Forster was a liberal 'at war with the liberal imagination'. He had, what the liberal in general lacks, 'moral realism', the power to envisage not just good and evil but good-and-evil.

He is content with the human possibility and content with its limitations. The way of human action of course does not satisfy him, but he does not believe there are any new virtues to be discovered; not by becoming better, he says, but by ordering and distributing his native goodness can man live as befits him . . . He is one of the thinking people who were never led by thought

to suppose they could be more than human and who, in bad times, will not become less ¹

Trilling's book did much to increase Forster's reputation in America. Various other American critics wrote on him,² and E. K. Brown said that he 'stands in this country as the greatest living English master of the novel'.

As a result of this boom, and through his expatriate contacts, he now began to acquire American friends. Isherwood wrote to him, somewhere about Christmas 1943, that he had a 'present' for him. The present was a young American actor named William Roerick, who was coming to London in a show called *This is the Army*. Roerick – engaging, good-looking, loquacious – charmed Forster, and the two quickly struck up a friendship. Roerick, who was in corporal's uniform, had brought for Forster in his cartridge-belt two acorns from the New World, to be planted in the Old. He also showered Forster with other presents: chocolate, soap, lemon-essence, American books and tickets for his show. ('I must say I liked being pelted by such a storm,' Forster wrote to Plomer.) After a few weeks, Roerick left with his show for Italy, meanwhile however, he had put Forster and the Buckinghams on a list of gifts from America, and before long quite a stream of parcels and fan-letters was arriving for Forster. In particular he was in touch with the painter Paul Cadmus, in New York, with Edith Oliver, who worked for the *New Yorker*, and with Mr and Mrs Edward Root, patrons of Roerick's *alma mater*, Hamilton College in Upper New York State. Hamilton College adopted the village school in Abinger, sending it pencils, crayons and exercise-books.

From Bob Buckingham, still employed on street-duty, Forster heard stories of the horrors and petty crime that flourished among the ruins of London. It seemed to Forster the Dark Ages returned, and he sought interpretation of it in the fourth and fifth centuries, reading quite extensively in St Augustine, St Jerome and other early Fathers. The thought of Rome invaded his experience of blitzed London. 'What a wilderness south of St Paul's' he recorded in his *Commonplace Book*.

¹ *E. M. Forster. a Study* (1943), Chapter 1.

² Among them were Clifton Fadiman, Newton Arvin and Morton Dauwen Zabel.

I stood (Feb. 1943) by St Augustine's – a tiny Wren – and saw the tower of St Nicholas Cole rising from the plain. Two dirty little boys had discovered an echo born in the desolation (as in the Coliseum's) and were inclined to exploit it commercially. 'The old man doesn't know where it comes from.' The sun had set coldish. A few birds whistled. In the portico of the Cathedral hundreds squeaked. Full of my own desolation, I thought 'It will never get straightened out,' also 'Here is beauty.' O I long for public mourning in the sense of recognition of what has happened.

For one of his Indian broadcasts, he agreed to write the last instalment of a five-part serial story, by different hands, set in the London of the blitz. The story featured a disgruntled intellectual, Moss, and an old enemy of his, Coburn, who had ruined his life and career. Moss finds Coburn lying in a bombed house and is about to murder him, when he notices that in the shadows, a pickpocket is waiting. Here Forster took up the narrative. For him, the interest of the story lay in the pickpocket, Stan, 'a creature of burning doorways, crashing beams, rubble heaps and spouting drains. His sort had haunted London ever since the foundation of the city, and 1940 seemed to bring it into its own.' Stan has a knuckle-duster, acquired while he was employed by the Mosleyites. 'It had been a happy episode – plenty of food, a bed to sleep in at the local centre, and ten shillings a week. "We will cleanse this city of London," he had been told. "We will hack our way through to power." Well, and why not? And he had taken part in one or two purity drives, and had hit one or two people whose noses were the wrong shape.'

In Forster's continuation, Coburn, recovering consciousness, takes Moss outside into the Park to talk over their past differences, and he eventually reveals that, to expiate his own behaviour towards Moss, he had gone to fight in the Spanish civil war. At this, Moss is reconciled, and the two shake hands. The pickpocket, meanwhile had been eavesdropping. He is discovered, there is a fight; and Moss and Coburn, without compunction or interest, leave him for dead. In an epilogue, Forster said.

I've shifted the interest from Coburn and Moss to the pickpocket, and I've tried to show how their fine sentiments would appear to that sort of man. He doesn't care about snobbery or outraged feelings or moral redemption or heroism in Spain, or hopes for the world's future. He can't see either why the two mugs quarrelled or why they make it up. And when they punish him – which they do

pretty thoroughly – they can't see that he too has a way of life,
and a way which, in our present chaos, may possibly flourish.

* * *

Still at the centre of his London life were Bob Buckingham and Joe Ackerley. Buckingham was by now burning to get into the services. 'I'm sick of hanging about,' he would say. 'I shall never forgive myself if I don't go.' Forster tried to dissuade him, but when, in 1943, the police were allowed to volunteer for service on bombers, Buckingham applied, and when turned down for defective eyesight, he tried, again without success, to join the Navy. Forster considered him boyish and irresponsible in his attitude, noting a few months later, after the beginning of the flying bombs, that he had matured. 'He has changed in the last week,' he wrote to Plomer (26 February 1944) '– I can't say for the worse, since his attitude is now my own. All the desire to give it back to the Germans has died in him. He is outwardly very grave.'

Ackerley, under the influence of the war, had been writing verse again. He wrote several poems to soldier friends killed in the war, depicting them as the obscure victims of an unjust society. He also wrote a long poem 'Micheldever', published in *Horizon* in August 1940, about a Hampshire ploughboy hanged for his part in the Labourers' Revolt of 1830; and this too, in its final section, became a comment of the present war:

The struggle still goes on. We give it names
You'd never comprehend and we defend
What you contested, but the fight's the same,
You fought at the beginning, we at the end.

And all are in it now; across the world
The dikes are down; in intricate dismay
Gainer and loser both in the flood are hurled:
Those tears you shed, we drown in them today.

Ackerley had been a success as a literary editor, and the *Listener's* book and art pages had now a high reputation, rivalling the *New Statesman's*. He would take great pains with his contributors and would write them pages-long critiques of their work, with much insistence on painful frankness. Forster enjoyed writing for Ackerley and for some years the bulk of his reviewing had been done for the *Listener*. Nevertheless he worried about Ackerley. He would write

wryly about him to Bob Buckingham: 'Joe came yesterday, very gloomy - trouble with the new editor¹ and muddle with the new guardsman. He now goes in for scientific introspection and analysis of his pre-natal state. . . . I'm afraid there's something really wrong with him.'² 'Joe very low. Nothing teaches him.'³ He would still give him admonitions, but more from habit than in hope of changing him: 'Joe, you must give up looking for gold in coal-mines,' he wrote to him (18 August 1939); 'it merely prevents you from getting amusement out of a nice piece of coal.'

Some time about 1943 Ackerley got involved with a new soldier and began an affair which was to have far-reaching and, in a way, disastrous consequences for him. The soldier, X—, who was married and had a child, was extremely good-looking, but vague, dishonest and feckless. Most of Ackerley's friends disliked him. Ackerley, however, insisted that he was a youth of great sensibility and beauty of character. X—'s mother had told Ackerley how, as a child, he had climbed a heap of dirt in the backyard, saying 'I am king of the cath'le'; 'I'm not surprised,' Ackerley had cried - 'He walks like a king!' X— was an incipient deserter, continually going absent without leave, and Ackerley vacillated over this, alternately lecturing him and encouraging him - buying him a railway-ticket back to his unit and then begging him not to use it. Soon, X— got involved in petty theft and house-breaking, and Ackerley found himself harbouring stolen property. Eventually, for X—'s own good, he reported him to the military police - making efforts through X—'s commanding officer, whom he happened to know, to have him punished lightly.

Forster had lunch with Ackerley at the height of this first crisis of his affair and became exasperated by Ackerley's self-absorption. 'A very Balzacian lunch with Joe,' he wrote to Plomer (12 June 1943). 'Since he could take no interest in any one or any subject, I asked about X—, and he then settled himself in his treadmill and ground out "And . . . er, and . . . er, ander" for the rest of our time together. Such a story of woe, weakness and muddle, and so ardently claimed by him as such! In some ways it must have been worse for me than

¹ Alan Thomas.

² Letter to R. J. Buckingham, 16 August 1939.

³ Letter to R. J. Buckingham, April 1939.

for him, since he cannot realize how much he has altered.' In addition to irritation he felt anxiety lest the police should make a raid on Ackerley's flat and seize his own letters. He tried to persuade Ackerley to return them, but without success. Before long, as the result of another lunch, an actual quarrel developed, and he wrote Ackerley a cutting letter (16 August 1943):

D M J.¹

Mind you let me know if I can help you with tea or other things in your problems. I am only how good for $\frac{1}{4}$ lb of the first-named commodity

As for my own news, I don't think I shall be telling you any more of it unless it is arrestingly bad or good, and this letter is, in that limited sense, a farewell

Ackerley wrote placatingly, and Forster was soon mollified, writing again, two days later 'I got so cross at my trivialities falling flat when they had had such encouraging reception for so many years. Now that I have said this I shall keep my temper better when I revert to them. as I am sure to do, and they fall flat again.'

* * *

In Abinger, Forster did a little 'war work'. He served on the Dorking Refugee Committee and, during most of 1942, attended each week at a local Searchlight Unit to lead discussions with the soldiers. For some time, too, he helped a friend, Mrs King the builder's wife, give a weekly party for Italian prisoners of war.

The war threw him and his mother together with one or two local celebrities. They got to know Marie Stopes, who lived at Norbury Park, near Dorking. She came to tea at West Hackhurst and, so Forster told Ackerley, 'proved very friendly and domestic'. Forster knew that Ackerley had asked her to review a current 'Penguin' on Sex, and he left a copy about to see if it would ruffle her, which it did. When he went to tea with her she said 'I told the Roman Catholic Church years ago it must do one of three things: Kill me, or go to pieces, or follow me. It tried to kill me but failed; it did not want to go to pieces; so it had followed me, and brings out books every word of which is copied from me.' She believed herself to be 'banned' by the B.B.C., and, hearing this, Forster took up her cause with George Barnes. Visits and courtesies continued: 'My mother has eaten an

¹ i.e. 'Dearest My Joe'.

egg kindly laid for her by Dr Marie Stopes and is not feeling very well,' Forster wrote to Plomer (18 April 1942)

Forster also saw something of Max Beerbohm, who, at the outset of the war, had taken refuge with his wife in a cottage in Abinger, lent them by Sydney Schiff. Beerbohm and he had been brought into contact by a neighbour, Sylvia Sprigge, who – with the assistance of R. C. Trevelyan – ran a literary journal called the *Abinger Chronicle* and had recruited them both to write for it.¹ Forster and Beerbohm liked each other and respected each other's work. Forster, it is true, considered Beerbohm's Rede Lecture on Lytton Strachey a failure; he told Sprott 'you can't quite do literary criticism on social sensitivity and flair.' And Beerbohm, persuaded by Sylvia Sprigge to read *Howards End* for the first time, had found it a very strange book indeed: 'a book beautiful and delightful throughout the first half of it,' he told Violet Schiff (5 June 1940), '– and then falling away ever so far beneath contempt. . . .'

I felt as though I had been taken up for an air-joyride by an 'ace' aeronaut, and had mounted high and far, seeing far below me a charming conspectus of things as they are, and had immensely enjoyed the sight, until suddenly the machine began to jerk and wobble, and I looked at the ace, and his face had turned pale green, and his jaw had dropped, and I said 'Is anything the matter?' and he gasped 'Yes, I'm afraid I—', and at that moment the machine gave a nose-dive, and, a few sickening moments later, I and my trusted pilot were no more.

For Beerbohm's seventieth birthday in 1942 a 'Maximilian Society' was founded, and the members presented him with a large gift of wine. Forster, as a member of the society, went one afternoon to help him drink it and was greatly intrigued that Beerbohm, with some ostentation, warmed a white burgundy in front of the fire. Neither then nor later could he decide if it had been a hoax.

* * *

The household at West Hackhurst diminished. Mrs Mawe died in the course of 1942, and Florence Barger returned to London in May of the same year, finding herself a new house in Golders Green. Her stay had been a success: she had helped in the village school, had kept peace among the other inmates, and had been a support during

¹ Forster contributed 'Luncheon at Pretoria', 'The Last of Abinger', 'The C Minor of That Life' and 'Mon Camarade est Anglais'.

Uncle Philip's last illness. Lily missed her, and so did Forster. He told Forrest Reid (4 September 1942) that his mother kept well and active but was 'terribly authoritarian'. 'Old women frighten me when I think of them: they are really giving all those orders and prohibitions to Death, and ordering Him to keep away from them and from their house.'

To keep himself in good temper at home, Forster established certain disciplines. Each morning, 'before the world of worries and kindnesses gathers strength,' he would write for a little in his Commonplace Book. It was what he called *recueillement*, and he warned himself not to confuse it with creation. One Sunday morning, sitting with his Commonplace Book before him, he realized that, for once, he was experiencing perfect silence. To complete it, he stopped the clock, and recorded his *recueillement*:

Listen out for silence! The mind is so accustomed to noise that it goes on imagining it even when there is no message from the ear.

The eye even in darkness and blindness (Charles)¹ sees something. The ear *can* hear nothing, can register the last vibration of a note and enter a state of negation, of absence, which should please the mystics. But the state is best reached when there is something to listen *for*, when the window is open as now and the vast landscape might pop and seethe but does not. Silence would be unsatisfactory in a cell.

Has any creature except a man had such thoughts as above, or attempted to record them?

The fate of Charles Mauron, enduring who could tell what sufferings and dangers in France, took on a symbolic importance for him. 'I disapprove of feeling intimidated,' he wrote to John Simpson (13 February 1941), 'and Charles Mauron's "Vain de se lamenter (et un peu dégoûtant)"',² keeps ringing in my ears and helps to steady me.' He would re-read the letters of his 'loved and lost Charles', copying portions out into his Commonplace Book, and felt that they fortified him. Early on in the war, at Mauron's instigation (or at least with his approval) he had begun writing an analysis of Beethoven's piano sonatas. 'I'm keen on a vision of Beethoven reached through playing him as well as listening to and based upon details,' he wrote about it to Forrest Reid (30 September 1940). The work was done at

¹ i.e. Charles Mauron.

² 'Useless to complain (and even a little disgusting).'

the keyboard, with the aid of the gramophone for sonatas too difficult for him to play, and over several years he made notes on this or that work or movement as the fancy took him. He copied out a sample note for Reid:

*Beethoven Op 90
First Movement*

Sonata in E Minor

1-81 a single gigantic gesture, although there are pauses in it and changes of theme. Lyric emotion until 65 when there is a good little growl, repeated in 71, which *might* introduce a fiercer mood. It doesn't, the gesture dies, the hand falls in peace. Though the actual sounds are less delicious than the 1st movement of Op. 101, the general effect is sweeter because the flow isn't interrupted or in spurts I find lovely the continuation. the bars 82-84 echoing 79-81; minims echoing crochets, I feel sure they belong to what comes after, not to what has gone, though I don't know how to prove this. The original motive returns in 84 but pricked with quavers; it becomes a little scholarly-harsh, and I don't enjoy myself so much until 108, when it has done its stuff and the first motive (or rather the second theme in it, 8 originally) comes in at 108, and itself turns very scholarly in the base [*sic*].

Movement almost in the front rank. So exciting and touching that I am always surprised to get to the end. One of the many Beethoven pieces that couldn't be any other piece

Bob Buckingham, from time to time, told Forster he must at all costs write another novel. He attacked him vehemently on this theme on 8 March 1943: 'Repeat yourself: it doesn't matter, the conditions are so changed. Say again that you believe in human relationships and disbelieve in power.' The words came home to Forster:

Yes - I am drawn into trivialities (home life) and diverted to unimportantcies (Civil Liberties, B.B.C.) yet I can still write well and I am wise . . . I consider my age, 64, my family record of idleness, inability to start, and three years of war which have weighed down my spirits, like everyone's, so that I no longer hit out vivid similes or make big jokes. And my mind would slip off into cynicism, or - more readily - into affection for Bob for bothering to attack me. But his voice! 'Leave all that out and start a new novel at once' cuts at me. So easy to reflect that he is crude and was a bit alcoholic. The plea remains . . .¹

He had had another brush with the Farrers, over the field and the footpath, and this time had been worsted. It had taken place in the

¹ Commonplace Book, p. 162.

second year of the war. He had begun to feel qualms that the field was not being cultivated, and had said as much to Mrs Cecil Farrer; however, incautiously, he let slip the fact that his sole interest in the field was the diagonal footpath across it. The Cecil Farrers had seized on this, and had manoeuvred him into giving up the field, on the understanding that he retained the use of the footpath. He had signed an agreement to this effect, though in fury; and having done so, he had written the Cecil Farrers two very sharp letters. The dispute was beginning to obsess him. He felt he must do something to curb the obsession, and, fired by a meeting of the Memoir Club, he decided to write a history of West Hackhurst and its Farrer neighbours. 'I am writing as quickly as Trollope and as badly as Balzac,' he told Plomer, 'but the sensation is novel. Do not mention this to any one. I am not mentioning it to any one else.' By October 1943 he had completed a substantial portion of 'West Hackhurst: a Country Ramble'. It was, he told Forrest Reid (16 October 1943), 'clever, bitter, not valuable.'

* * *

During the summer of 1944 German flying-bombs fell round Abinger. Forster and Lily took them calmly – too calmly, Forster tended to feel. 'Life is certainly odd,' he wrote (21 August 1944) to Paul Cadmus, one of his new-found American friends, 'and what I resent is that it must be making *me* so odd, and people elsewhere (e.g. in Poland) still odder. It does not seem natural that I should have interrupted this letter to call out to my mother (aged 88) to keep away from glâss, that she should have transmitted the warning in calm tones while packing me up some margarine, and that I should have gone on with this letter equally calmly. One adapts oneself to conditions, and it is depressing that one should, for it means that one is failing to notice them.' He blamed himself and his friends for not making more imaginatively of the world's amazing situation. 'I do a little thinking about the Flying Bombs, though,' he wrote to Isherwood (7 July 1944). 'I believe they are going to be important psychologically. They will bitch the Romance of the Air – war's last beauty-parlour.'

• As best he could, he kept busy. He was up in London most weeks for his Indian broadcasts and was doing some lecturing, delivering a paper on 'Literature Between the Wars' at various places, including Glasgow University. The P.E.N. had organized a five-day conference in August, in honour of the tercentenary of Milton's 'Areopagitica',

[1945]

A Visit to Ferney

and he agreed to preside. Its theme was to be 'The Future Spiritual and Economic Values of Humanity'. 'A neat little subject,' he remarked to Paul Cadmus, promising to write again when he had cooked the Spiritual and Economic Geese of Humanity 'There will be a great dispute as to whether they can be got into the same oven.' In his own addresses¹ to the conference he continued his campaign against secrecy in national life and against censorship. Would Milton have approved of the 'wireless', he asked?

Yes and No. He would have been enthusiastic over the possibilities of broadcasting, and have endorsed much it does, but he would not approve of the 'agreed script' from which broadcasters are obliged to read for security reasons . . . You can argue that the present supervision of broadcasters is necessary and reasonable, and that a silly or cranky speaker might do endless harm on the air. But if you feel like that, you must modify your approval of the *Areopagitica*.

* * *

In December 1944 letters began at last to arrive from France, among them a long one from Charles and Marie Mauron. They were safe and well (though Charles, as Forster learned later, had been active in the Resistance and several times had been in great danger). The Germans had just decamped from the neighbourhood, and Charles, though now quite blind, had been appointed *maire* of St Rémy, as his father had been before him. For Forster, the renewed contact with Charles and with France seemed the ending of a five years' imprisonment.

Not long after this Lily, who was now ninety, fell ill, and by March it was plain she was dying. On 5 March she would not get up, a day or two later she had a fall from her bed; and then early in the night of 10 March she had another fall. Forster slept for the rest of this night in the passage outside her bedroom, and the next day they had a tender farewell conversation. Lily said: 'I shan't be long with you,' to which he replied, 'But your love will.' At 1.30 p.m., as he was giving her some beef broth from a spoon, she fell back and was dead.

'Yes - sad news. My mouldy mother, as you once called her, is dead,' he wrote to Joe Ackerley (13 March), 'and I expect now to

¹ i.e. his opening address, and a talk 'The Tercentenary of the "Areopagitica"', reprinted in *Two Cheers for Democracy*. The proceedings of the conference were recorded in a symposium *Freedom of Expression* (1945), edited by Hermon Ould.

start mouldering myself, in accordance with the laws.' Florence Barger and his Aunt Rosalie came down to West Hackhurst, in alternation, over the next few weeks, to give him company, and Agnes the maid looked after him with great solicitude: '... entirely admirable, helpful, feeling,' he described her to Ackerley (13 March 1945), 'yet never pretending that she and mistress have liked each other.' He was calm, though at moments grieving bitterly and feeling that he could not face life alone. His diary recorded:

- 5 April. Churchyard with blossoms. Broke down returning.
- 6 April. Bob to W.H. Happy.
- 10 April. Broke down returning to W.H.
- 13 April. Went to Dorking. Broke down.
- 11-13 May. May and Robin here. Happy.

He felt he must begin clearing the house. Both his aunt Laura and his mother had been hoarders – the one from family piety, the other from inertia – so that the house was stuffed and overflowing with possessions. For the moment he could not face his mother's room, but he made a start on the papers and letters, some of them dating back 150 years, and all though April he was reading and tearing them up and putting them on bonfires. He also went away for a visit or two, going down at the end of April to stay with Ted B— and his wife Madge in Surrey. The B—s were running a pub, and he spent a cheerful Saturday evening in the bar while Madge served and Ted thumped the piano, helping afterwards with washing the glasses. The thought occurred to him that it was the first time he had really enjoyed himself in a pub. After a few weeks he was able to resume his broadcasting to India. And by June he had become involved in the making of a film, *Diary for Timothy*, for the Ministry of Information. (It was a not-too-successful essay in the 'What-kind-of-world-shall-we-be-making-after-the-war?' style, in which, impersonated by Michael Redgrave, he addressed a baby, Timothy Perkins, born exactly five years after the beginning of the war.¹)

Intermittently, remembering the loss of his mother, he was still drowned by waves of despair. On the day after the Japanese surrender he woke feeling that he couldn't 'live to himself', and all through the day he found himself repeating 'I cannot go on, simply

¹ The film, made by the Crown Film Unit, was directed by Humphrey Jennings and was distributed in November.

cannot,' and then, 'surely she will give up being dead now?' In this emergency, an old instinct came to his aid, and, as often in the past in times of stress, he deliberately sought relief in erotic fantasies. During August he made another visit to the B—s and to Walton Regatta, where Bob Buckingham was rowing, and in his diary afterwards (13 August 1945) he arranged his impressions in the form of an erotic film-scenario:

Sun sex and a little pain because Bob was rough and sarcastic to me on his boat Otherwise flowers and trousers opening Want a film Boys sleep in the shadow of a car by the tow-path, bare to the middle one of them, and the other's arm round him from behind Yorkshire boy by the bridge selling soft drinks and filling up my glass when it spilt down my trousers 'looks like something else.' Youth in lav at night, asks me time, accepts cig, is a brick-layer, drunk? Little M Ted and a quick one on the Morrison¹ Cock and one ball of a policeman in shorts seen from the boat below, the sun shining full into their tranquillity I gazed while he talked to the company. Once or twice he hitched, but they sidled back into view. May kissed me so affectionately when I left, that helped, so did a farming lad with a splinter in his finger. All warmth and willingness. Words – adjectives especially – too formal. All smiles, lightings up, clothes pushed back, soft curves, every where the brightness on young men's faces usually reserved for girls In the faces & glances, readiness. I in a way wasn't there at all except during Bob's unkindness – and what a rest to be absent! I was the light up the big policeman's shorts and what it touched I was the splinter up the farm lad's nail. All this needs putting without 'I', so where is a film of people seeing and touching bits of each other in the sun, and not thinking about love or lust. Each night my sleep was stronger, and when I woke with that fatal clear-sighted jump, I had more control over my thoughts than Dame Worry. Should this be in the lovely film too – sensuous angels so driving off Worry that we don't know they protect us? Sun and sex – O teach us no lesson, teach us nothing, come again and open trousers and flowers till – O no last word! Yes, it is warmth, and one's own warmth, and will be there until death and perhaps a little after . . . Don't ever look back at the sun and the sex. Get them into your blood, and they will shine in your eyes. Be impatient and irritable if it helps you turn the right way . . .

A day or two later William Plomer came to spend a night at West Hackhurst and found Forster composed and cheerful It was a day of

¹ Perhaps an allusion to a Morrison air-raid shelter?

national peace-celebrations, and Forster had hung out flags dating from Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee. He took Plomer blackberrying in Piney Copse, showed him some material for a book he was projecting on his Thornton ancestors,¹ and gave him a gold-and-white tea-service. He told Plomer he wished he hadn't 'so many memories, plans and principles.' On 17 August he recorded in his diary: 'I am better, and it is the sunshine.'

¹ i.e. the future *Marianne Thornton* (1956).

11 The Reluctant Lion

Forster at present had no particular plans for his life, indeed he was trying not to look ahead. Thus when this summer he received an invitation from the All-India P.E.N. to attend a conference of writers in Jaipur, he accepted eagerly. To revisit India at this moment, he felt, 'would be the ideal diversion, and he blessed his fame for procuring him it. All his friends wanted him to go, he wrote to Isherwood (26 August 1945), "and some may be glad to get rid of me, for I partly died when my mother did, and 'must smell sometimes of the grave – I have noticed and disliked that smell in others occasionally.' He was to be flown to India at the British Council's expense, in the company of Hermon Ould, Secretary of the English P.E.N.; and plane reservations – hard to come by for ordinary travellers – were to be arranged for them by the Secretary of State for India. It worried Forster a little that he should be leaving Agnes alone in the house. However, she was not perturbed, saying 'no one would run away with her', and Joe Ackerley and Sebastian Sprott volunteered to come down from time to time to see her and attend to his mail.

He set out on 5 October 1945, leaving a spray of honeysuckle on his mother's pillow. It was his first air-journey of any length, and the experience excited him. It struck him, that, during its two days, he would have recapitulated forty years of his life – France, Sicily, Egypt, India. 'Few people alive can have such culture – practically all the Englishman's tradition.' He was made to feel guilty by the endless lavish meals and was faintly repelled by his companions, all 'priority' travellers like himself.

How they chatter while the Sunderland sways exactly like a boat. Up 5000 feet above the tortured earth, rushing on with masses of uneaten and spoiling food. I was relieved to see the man-indifferent desert of Sinai, which frightened Ould. Me Sardinia frightened with Mussolini's salt colonies, ruled on the ugly liver-coloured earth which would have been glad to kill me!¹

He was met in Delhi, as arranged, by a novelist friend Ahmed Ali, a distant relative of Masood. Ahmed Ali and he had first met in London just before the war. (Forster thought him a good writer, as well as a 'perfect charmer', and had helped find a publisher for his first novel, *Twilight in Delhi* (1940)) Ali put him up for a day or two in his sister's house in Delhi, and then, since the Conference was not to begin for twelve days, the two set out on a sightseeing tour. Forster was moved by the experience. 'I feel like a sponge which has been dropped back into an ocean whose existence it had forgotten,' he wrote to Bob Buckingham (8 October 1945). 'I have a swelling soul, and it is not the same as a swollen head'

His stay in India, he knew, would be a different sort of thing from his earlier wanderings. For one thing, as he soon found, he was never alone – being constantly attended by 'a Gide entourage, who do every thing for me, fetch, carry, plan, pay, walk, fight.' He was a public figure, a famous Englishman, fêted and interviewed, and expected to give talks and broadcasts, and to sign autograph-books, wherever he went. Invariably, he was asked what changes had struck him in India since his last visit, and he grew fluent with his answer, which was 'a higher level of general conversation' and 'the disappearance of *purdah*'. 'If this is fame, I can bear it,' he wrote to Sprott (12 October 1945). Nevertheless, he longed for solitude, and he seized such chances of it as offered. As he and his party were driving to Jaipur, they stopped to visit a ruined Pathan mosque by the wayside, and Forster remained inside for half an hour in meditation. Ahmed Ali, who kept him company in silence, remembered that, as they emerged, his face was radiant. Several more times during Forster's stay, friends saw him go down on his knees in mosques, like a believer.

The Jaipur Conference, attended by a thousand or more, took place in the town hall, in a vast apartment looking out, through arches, on to the roofs and trees of the Maharaja's palace. On the

¹ Travel-diary, 7 October 1945.

platform with Forster were the Prime Minister of Jaipur and Mrs Sarojini Naidu, famous as a poet and associate of Gandhi. ('Loveliest of toads,' Forster called her in his diary.)

During the three days of the conference they heard speeches on the future of the Indian languages, on the Indian copyright act, on a scheme for an encyclopaedia, and on 'Literature as a unifying force'. Forster himself gave a version of his talk on 'Literature Between the Two World Wars'. He thought the conference went well, as such things go, and was an event that would not have been possible twenty-five years back. As the speech-making went on, he noticed above a movement of dim figures, a 'sort of cloud-movement high up in the thickness of the wall', which he realized to be women watching from the *purdah*-gallery. 'We might be the future,' he wrote later,¹ 'but we were observed by the past.'

A week or two after the conference, he set out with Ahmed Ali for Calcutta. Either by accident or design, it was the first time he had visited Bengal – most likely by design, for Bengal was the home of nationalist politics and also of the Tagore cult, neither of which attracted him. The ten days he now spent there proved the least enjoyable of his stay, and Calcutta as a city seemed to him quite desolating. He was staying a few miles outside, with his old friend Hashim Ali,² but spent his days in the city, attending official functions and meeting innumerable writers, half of whom he suspected to be gate-crashers. More enjoyably, he was also taken for a tour of painters' studios, and bought a painting from the prolific Jamini Roy.³ He was invited to lunch at Government House, and wrote to Sprott (14 November 1945):

Yes, yes, India is changing. Past the throne of Warren Hastings, down apartments renovated by Curzon, trots a straightforward Australian dame, thanking you for coming, and knowing, she too, all about Jamini Roy, and Gopal Gosh.⁴ Outside the chaprassis fling wide the magnificent iron gates to Morgan and worse – guests of Mrs Casey in dhotis and saris – and mutter to one another that there was a time when *lat* sahibs were *lat* sahibs.

¹ In a broadcast talk, 'India After Twenty-five Years', reprinted in *Two Cheers for Democracy* as 'India Agam'.

² Hashim was a cousin of Ahmed Ali.

³ Forster became friendly with Jamini Roy and opened an exhibition of his paintings in London the following year.

⁴ Another artist whose studio he had visited and who gave him a drawing he much liked.

During his stay in Bengal, he spent a night at Santiniketan, the university or 'Home of Peace' founded by Tagore. He was pleasantly surprised by it: 'I came to sneer, I remained to sleep,' he wrote to Sprott. 'It really is an agreeable place, and the Great Spirit was referred to by his disciples quite sensibly'

His next destination was Hyderabad. It was expected that he should stay at the Government Guest House, but, being weary of playing the public man, he escaped to the home of his friend Sajjad Mirza,¹ now the state's Education Secretary. His few days in Hyderabad were a time full of feeling for him. 'I had not realized how much of my heart had gone into this place,' he noted (17 November 1945).

Such happy days when Masood and the Hydaris were friends and at their best. I visited yesterday Sir Amin Jung² too. Both moved, and sitting at his feet I had the peace that comes from Indian old men.

He was living much in memory. One day while there, he asked Sajjad Mirza to drive him to a certain palm-covered hillside at sunset and leave him alone for a while, when Sajjad returned, he told him he had been thinking of Egypt.

Meanwhile the Resident had been ringing for Forster at the Guest House, in vain. Tiring of this, he asked Sajjad Mirza, who he knew was a friend of Forster's, if he could locate him and deliver an invitation to him. 'And did he include you in it?' asked Forster, when he heard. 'No,' said Mirza 'Then I shan't go. These people have no manners'; and a message was sent that Forster was unwell³

While he was in Hyderabad state, he took the chance, which he had bungled previously, of visiting Ajanta and its famous Buddhist cave-frescoes. The paintings proved all that he had been told or could have hoped, and they gave a happier turn to his mourning for his mother. He noted in his travel-journal (23 November 1945):

As a rule, I only receive impressions when I forget my grief. But the paintings have fused sadness with interest in the outer world, and have helped me towards doing the same. It is not the loss but the shut-up feeling that is so horrid. The paintings (caves 1 & 2) have not been overpraised, and have gone further towards fusion

¹ Brother to Ahmed and Abu Saeed Mirza, see Vol. 1, p. 202, and *passim*.

² A friend from his 1921 visit, once Private Secretary to the Nizam.

³ Later, the Resident's wife rang at Mirza's house and asked to speak to Forster 'So the game was up,' related Mirza, and Forster went for a meal.

than the Italian 14th & 15th cent. art to which it is natural to compare them. They are not mystic – geese, Bhils, elephants eating lotus, do not go wispy. But they have found a connection (unconscious) between my two worlds.

The last month of his stay he spent mostly in Bombay, in the house of Mrs Wadia, the Secretary of the All-India P.E.N. He enjoyed Bombay – it was 'grand, fascinating and Levantine,' he told Sprott – and he performed his public duties there with zeal, lecturing to the Bombay Rotarians, to the Gujarat Vernacular Society and so on, also broadcasting on 'Has India Changed?' He felt well and vigorous and believed that, as regards India at least, he had deserved his fame. Every now and then, though, the thought came to him that he was now empty, 'a shell'. On the plane home, he meditated a little sadly.

I have failed to do what I might. The only first class thing about me now is my grief. With dissatisfaction I look back upon myself in India, humorous, conciliatory, an old dear, whose lavish gestures gave away very little, and has been too idle to record the honest-to-God facts . . . The day after tomorrow shall be 67. O lovely world, teach others to expound you as I have not been able to do!

* * *

In London, on the morning after his return, he rang Bob Buckingham at the Section House to announce his arrival. Buckingham sounded mysterious. 'Lots of things have happened since you left,' he said; 'some good, some bad.' 'What are the bad things?' asked Forster at once. 'Tell you when I see you,' said Buckingham. He came round during the day and to Forster's instant inquiry, 'What's the bad news?' replied breezily 'Oh it's West Hackhurst. You've got to leave in nine months or something. Jack Sprott will tell you all about it.'

This way of breaking the news, Forster soon discovered, had been stage-managed by Sprott. A few days after Forster's departure for India, Sprott had found in Forster's mail a letter from the Farrer solicitors, saying that Lady Bridges (the late Lord Farrer's daughter) would regretfully have to ask Forster to leave West Hackhurst, since the house was needed for a relative. He had taken it to Forster's solicitors, thinking there might be some protection under the Rent Restriction Act, however they could offer little hope, so, having

debated whether to tell Forster, he had decided to keep the news for his return.¹

Buoyed by his Indian trip, Forster took the news coolly, and for a few weeks, he went about telling his friends and himself, with a liberal's 'fairmindedness', that there was really no reason why he shouldn't be told to go. By this time he had been given formal notice to quit, in a year's time; and when a further letter arrived from the Farrers' lawyers, he sent a gracious reply, thanking Lady Bridges for giving him so much advance warning. (It occurred to him he might as well not antagonize her, as he had not kept the house in good repair and might be liable for dilapidations) He told the news to Agnes, who was scared, and to Bone the gardener, who said merely 'Well . . .' and 'Well, I'm sorry.' Neither told anyone else, so for the moment the rumour did not reach the village. Nor, for the time being, could Forster guess who was to supplant him at West Hackhurst.

He began to consider where he might go, when he left Abinger. His first thought was Stevenage, his childhood home and the place where, if anywhere, he could imagine he had roots. But now he discovered a new aspect to his plight. the Labour Government had just declared Stevenage the site of a 'new town'. He was thwarted equally by 'feudalism' and by Socialism, and it seemed as if from now on he were not meant to have 'roots'. Of course, he could forget 'roots', and buy himself a house without associations. A friend of Bob Buckingham's sent him word of a property at East Molesey, and he went to view it. It was small, modern and semi-detached, very trim and convenient; but confronted with it he simply could not imagine himself or his furniture in it. This was almost his sole effort at house-hunting; and for want of a better plan, he began to consider going to America for a long stay.

At this juncture, he heard from J. T. Sheppard, now the Provost of King's College, to say that the College wished to make him an Honorary Fellow. He was gratified; and in his letter of acceptance he remarked casually that he would soon be homeless, so that it would be pleasant to feel he had some connection somewhere. It was a fortunate remark. Sheppard passed it on. And as a result, the Governing Body asked him if he would like to come and 'reside' in

¹ 'And great praise I got for this,' he said later, to the author.

College. This was a quite unusual offer, however he was highly regarded in King's and was felt to have peculiar claims on it. He accepted gratefully, not knowing if he should enjoy a life in College rooms, but telling himself it would give him a respite, time in which to look about him.

By this time, his feelings over West Hackhurst had grown rancorous and bitter. In February he was invited by Keynes, who was chairman of the Covent Garden Opera Trust, to the *première* of *The Sleeping Beauty*. It was a lavish occasion, marking the re-opening of the opera-house. He went with May Buckingham, and for the length of the first act he forgot all his chagrins, telling himself with elation that it was the end of wartime gloom and austerity. However, during the interval, while they were having supper with the Keyneses in a private room, he found himself being introduced to Lady Bridges. They shook hands. And the physical contact brought all his bitterness in a flood. For the rest of the evening, oblivious to the ballet, he was composing crushing letters to his Farrer 'enemies'.

Two days later, he received a letter from Lady Bridges's sister, Miss Frances Farrer, telling him she was to be the new tenant of West Hackhurst and asking if they might meet to discuss arrangements. She said how much she regretted inconveniencing him 'But my roots are very deep in Abinger, and we can no longer afford to stay on at the Hall.' He said to himself, it was an example of the Farrer 'friendliness' technique – the word had passed between the sisters that he could be got round – and, egged on by Joe Ackersley, he replied that, from his own point of view, he could think of nothing requiring immediate discussion; 'and to be frank I should prefer to be undisturbed by callers during the remainder of my tenancy.' To further requests, that Lady Bridges might be allowed to come and measure the rooms, he replied that he would be happy to receive her in six months' time. Meanwhile, he told Agnes and Bone to turn away unwanted callers.

He had fallen into an irrational state of mind over the affair. He knew this himself. For one thing, he had never felt particularly at home in West Hackhurst, having continued half-consciously to regard it as his aunt's house. For another, he could hardly have hoped to go on running it with only Agnes to help him – Agnes, worn out in his service, old, bent double and with bad feet. And what younger servant would come to a house so impossibly inconvenient? But the

matter had passed beyond reason. It had come at a moment when, with his mother's death, he was feeling emotionally 'homeless'. And it had disturbed profound and complicated class-feelings, springing from the social difference between his mother's and his father's families. With all his ironies about 'feudalism' and 'visiting his estates', he was not indifferent to his status in Abinger. It was part of his place in the world, the place he had won for himself as a writer, and he felt his expulsion as an attack on it

* * *

It remained for him to sort his possessions, deciding what to take to Cambridge, what to give to friends, and what to sell or burn. The task, when he addressed himself to it, appeared enormous. The house contained the accumulations not just of his Aunt Laura's life and his own and his mother's, but of the whole Thornton past. There was a whole coach-house full of furniture. There were wicker dress-baskets full of letters dating back to the time of Wilberforce and before; innumerable books; seventy pieces of Wedgwood china; and rolls of silk brought back by him from India, never opened and rotting at the folds. He could, of course, have an auction at the house, but that would mean deciding what to keep, which he could not at once do; so all through the year of 1946 he continued sorting and reading and giving away and sending to jumble-sales. The dining-room mantel-piece, designed by his father, was removed and sent up to Cambridge, to be installed in his rooms there, and the sundial on the lawn was uprooted and moved to the parish churchyard, as a memorial to his mother. He even, as he had done fifty years before on leaving Rooksnest, drew up a plan of the kitchen garden. The task took hold of his imagination. During his rummaging he found, he wrote to Plomer (3 July 1946), a box full of gold and jewels, including a locket 'disclosing two unknown people inside who had been facing one another in the darkness all this time'. He took the task seriously. 'I see myself as a historic figure, if not a very important one: the last survivor, the last possessor, of a particular tradition,' he told Plomer (28 July 1946). 'Your family got their clearing up finished a little earlier. Osbert,¹ whose second volume I am now at, will have to start his when I am done.' He was instinctively spinning his removal out, as a protection against other thoughts, and he was still engaged upon

¹ Osbert Sitwell (1892-1969), who published an autobiography in five volumes between 1944 and 1950.

it when, in September, he received a letter from Harvard University, inviting him to America the following spring to take part in a Symposium on Music Criticism. The invitation seemed to him a reprieve, and he sent his acceptance the same morning.

Meanwhile, during the same month, Miss Farrer at last paid her visit to West Hackhurst, in the company of an architect. She came prepared to be friendly, but Forster had chosen his line, which was to be, as he later put it, 'courtesy and personal hatefulness'. He ignored her half-proffered hand, received an allusion to her childhood in stony silence, refused to sell her his hens or to solicit Bone to stay on as her gardener – all this with implacable politeness, received of course with equal politeness by Miss Farrer. He made one tiny 'score'. The architect caught sight of a plaque in the north verandah and read it out (stumblingly, because of the fancy lettering): 'Edward Morgan Llewellyn Forster'. 'Is that anything to do with you?' he asked. 'My father,' replied Forster, and he thought he noticed Miss Farrer wince. After the visit, Agnes said she hoped Miss Farrer would never get a proper meal.

So far as he could gauge it, feeling in the village seemed to be on his side. For one thing, the Farrers, though in general good landlords, were felt to be a little domineering – this anyway was the reputation of the previous Lord Farrer, who had so alarmed certain of the timider villagers that they would hide from his sight. Forster's own local friends, the Kings, the Reads, the Meade family at the Rectory, naturally supported him, and as his departure drew near, Mrs Meade organized a farewell party for him in the Village Hall. There was dancing, and musical chairs, and the Rector gave a speech about him – a very bad one, Forster thought – after which he presented him with a book in which most of the village had signed their names. Forster then made a speech of his own, in which he exhorted the company to defend their field-paths and rights of way. This, too, did not go down very well, or so he thought: it was too didactic for the occasion. None the less, he felt himself popular. One of the young women of the village said to him, 'You belong here always,' and in his present mood this enchanted him. For years to come he would think sentimentally of this evening.

His prolonged removal came at last to an end. There were final sales, bonfires and distributions of possessions. Agnes had found a home for her retirement, in the house of a niece in Barnet, and Forster,

who went to look at it, felt satisfied she would be comfortable there. She was to take with her the cat Tinka; and Forster, in his diary, recorded the last night of Tinka's companion, Toma, who was to be 'put to sleep'.

Oct 22 . . . Much affection during drawing room supper and returned for more. How little I mind his cankered ear. Yesterday morning this very sweet cat, disliking Tinka on my bed, but desirous to honour me, sat on my knee and clawed my pyjama breast. What pleasure these cats have been and felt – years of purring, my creation. Tomorrow he will 'sleep' in 'mother's pocket'. Rubbishy word, sleep.

* * *

He arrived in Cambridge in the first days of November. The arrangement was that he should occupy a room in the front court of King's – to his pleasure, it had been that of his old friend and tutor Wedd. And, in addition, partly so as to protect his privacy, he should have some lodgings outside the college, in the house of the Senior Tutor, Patrick Wilkinson.¹ He was, he realized, very fortunate – comfortably lodged, cared for, and surrounded by friends – and his College room, spacious and full of his own furniture, already had a look of West Hackhurst. For some weeks, nevertheless, he felt dazed and miserable. As soon as his presence in Cambridge had become known, people had made efforts to meet and lionize him, but for the moment he did not feel equal to it. He thought he must escape; '... there is no privacy,' he complained to May Buckingham, 'and people are always pestering one to be interesting.' He could not imagine what life he should make for himself in Cambridge, nor how long he should remain there. Indeed the one definite prospect in his mind was his coming visit to America. His best support for the moment was his old friend Francis Bennett² at Caius College. He would go round to Bennett's rooms daily and lament his fate: it was, he said later, one of Bennett's great charms that one could complain to him without good cause.

By the next term, he had begun to look more kindly on Cambridge. He had re-established contact with the Apostles Society – now active again after a long interval – and had invited them to meet in his room, taking an interest in the society's 'births'. He also began a

¹ L. P. Wilkinson (1907–), author of *Horace and his Lyric Poetry* (1945), etc.

² See p. 45.

little college teaching in English literature. The word spread that he was accessible, and he began to receive and accept invitations to undergraduate parties.

He had been intending, as soon as he had settled in, to go for a stay with Forrest Reid in Belfast. All through the years he had kept up with Reid, encouraging him, consoling him in his solitude, and helping him to find reviewing. He was much attached to Reid – 'I have a constant and remote love for you which began when I first read the Bracknells,' he once wrote to him – though, privately, he thought his later novels thin. Just as he was preparing for his visit, however, he heard through a friend that Reid was dying, and a few days later the news came of his death. He had always thought Reid neglected by Belfast, and in an affectionate obituary article on him he wrote:

He was the most important person in Belfast, and, though it would be too much to say that Belfast knew him not, I have sometimes smiled to think how little that great city, engaged in its own ponderous purposes, dreamed of him or indeed of anything.

* * *

On 14 April 1947 he set off by plane for the United States. He meant so far as possible to make it a private visit. In India, two years before, he had felt it his duty sometimes to play the great man, but here he would have no such duty. There was, of course, his Harvard lecture to deliver, and he had agreed to give some readings from his novels here and there about the country. Essentially, however, his aims were to see friends – especially Bill Roerick, who had appointed himself Forster's host and guide – and, above all, to go sightseeing. With Roerick's help he had formed an ambitious plan of travel, encompassing the length and breadth of the continent.

Roerick was there to meet him at the airport in New York. He took Forster to stay at his mother's house, on Marble Hill Avenue, and, for the next three days, he and his friend Tom Coley drove Forster about the city, sightseeing and visiting. In Forster's mind there lingered Lowes Dickinson's diatribes against America, and he found New York 'more gracious and benevolent' than he had expected. They met various of Roerick and Coley's actor friends and spent a cheerful and tipsy evening with Edith Oliver, drinking 'May Wine' (hock with woodruff and strawberries in it). On another evening, his

friends took him to *Annie Get Your Gun*, his first American musical. To start with, as Roerick recalled, Ethel Merman's yelling quite baffled Forster. then, at her number, 'I'm an Indian too', in which Annie tries clumsily to move and dance as a Sioux, he became much taken with her 'But she was so civil to the Indians' he exclaimed.¹

Soon after his arrival in New York, he paid a call on Paul Cadmus, at the studio in Greenwich Village which he shared with another painter, Jared French, and his wife. It was a 'perfect' meeting, Forster told Bob Buckingham – his visit having taken them by surprise, before they could 'make suitable arrangements for entertaining the Great Writer'. His hosts fetched wine and delicatessen from a nearby restaurant, and, as he told Bob, he 'ate, drank and talked enormously' – learning from them later that he was rumoured in America to be a man who never spoke. French showed him a painting of his own, an allegory entitled 'Learning', and Forster, after a pause, remarked: 'Isn't it odd that we think of men of the past as heads only but those of the future as having bodies also?' 'Not a stupid comment,' wrote French afterwards,² 'and, poor dear, he was put to it to say something; and with the artist beside him!' Cadmus and the Frenches were to be out of New York by the time that he planned his return there, and they insisted he must use their flat, as well as coming to see them in their summer retreat at Provincetown.

It had been agreed between him and Roerick that, in the interval before the Harvard Symposium, they should spend a week or so at Tyringham, a remote spot in the Berkshires where Roerick had a dilapidated farmhouse; he had wanted this quiet spell to 'ease' him into the country, also to give him the chance to revise his Harvard lecture.

The farmhouse itself was uninhabitable in cold weather, so they stayed nearby, in the house of some friends named Rudd. The view from the windows made Forster feel he was living in *Ethan Frome*. '... scenery between Switzerland Hindhead, half covered with snow, milky white birch stems,' he wrote of the place to Sprott; 'in two words New England, nostalgic, a little meagre, a little starved, shelving and rising towards the grandiose, checked, and the Houstonian flowing not quite in a gorge.' On their first evening in the house,

¹ See W. Roerick, 'Forster and America', in *Aspects of E. M. Forster* ed. O. Stallybrass (1969), pp. 61–72.

² In a letter to the author, 17 February 1972.

Forster read Roerick his Harvard lecture, and Roerick told him it had no shape, so they set to work to reconstruct it. 'You have put the spade into the soil and turned it over,' Forster told Roerick when he saw his proposed revisions. 'It had to be turned over, but you cut through all those worms, which must now be sewn together or destroyed'

Tyringham was in Shaker country, the Rudds' house itself being Shaker-built, and he was taken on a visit to the Shaker colony at Mount Lebanon. Only a handful of occupants remained, all old and some a little crazed, and for some years there had been no 'shaking' – indeed no religious activity at all. Forster chatted with the Elderess, who, to the envy of his friends, gave him a home-made ruler. He felt no great romance in the place. The most interesting thing about it, he noted in his Journal, was how it interested and excited his American friends, filling them with a desire for the primitive. 'It is a country (say I after 5 days) with an intense *feeling* for the past: much more so than India.'

During his stay at Tyringham, he was interviewed by a journalist from the *New Yorker*. 'We found him a shy, apprehensive Edwardian gentleman of sixty-eight, with a long sensitive nose and tousled tan mustache,' the reporter wrote.

He was alone and huddled over a thundering grate fire in a room full of cool Shaker furniture when we arrived. He welcomed us with a shiver, a blush, and an uneasy chortle. 'I'm really a frightful old bore,' he said, twisting the collar of a loose brown sweater. 'I have no intention of being bright. Not that I mind being bright you know, but I can never seem to accomplish it.' He gave an explosive laugh and lapsed into a rather forbidding silence.

They talked about sightseeing, and Forster told him he expected to go up the Empire State Building.

'I think I'll pass up the Niagara Falls, though, I've seen Victoria Falls, you know, and I expect one lot of water falling over a ledge is rather like another.' An expression of anxiety suddenly appeared on his face. 'I say,' he said, 'I do hope that won't annoy anybody. I've heard that there's a great controversy between the Niagara and the Victoria people.'

The subject of his writings came up, and Forster told the reporter that Americans had been 'awfully kind' to his books.

But admiration can be a little frightening, you know. I understand there are some very deep readers of mine at Harvard, and I'm a bit uneasy about facing them.

The interview was published on 3 May, and Forster told Bob Buckingham to look out for it, saying it was proving a sort of test: 'Every decent sensible person dislikes it. Everyone who is a fool, a snob, or a shit congratulates me on it. I don't altogether dislike it myself. What may be deduced?'

He was due in Harvard on 29 April, and on his way there he took the chance to visit Hamilton College, the home of his wartime benefactors the Edward Roots. There was much talk of their gifts and food-parcels, and he gave a public talk on the subject, telling his audience that the English in the post-war period, were now 'not starving but bored, not ragged but dingy'.


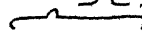
At Harvard he was the guest of Professor Finlay. He was the star performer and opening speaker of the three-day symposium (1-3 May), and in his talk 'The Raison D'Etre of Criticism in the Arts',¹ he gently needled the 'deep readers' he associated with Harvard. The 'critical state', he said, had many merits, it employed 'some of the highest and subtlest faculties of man'; but it was 'grotesquely remote from the state responsible for the works it affects to expound'. Criticism did not have 'spiritual parity' with creation, and 'his main conclusion on it had therefore to be unfavourable'.

The Finlays gave a reception, at which Forster and T. S. Eliot were guests of honour. The two writers took up position in front of the fireplace, but very soon a vociferous group had collected round Eliot, and had pinned him down on a sofa, for questioning, leaving Forster more or less deserted. An eyewitness, George Martin, recalled that Forster was quite unabashed, looking on at the scene with amusement. Martin and he exchanged glances. He came over. And, while Harry Levin was grilling Eliot on his *Theory of Language*, Forster made mild chit-chat about travel in America.

His own major travels were now to begin, and on 10 May he set off by plane for the West. A day or two later he was descending the Grand Canyon on mule-back. He had been wondering, as so often, whether he were still able to respond to travel-experience, and here he found himself answered. The Canyon astonished him more than

¹ Published in *Two Cheers for Democracy*.

any object that he had ever seen. The same evening, from his 'ranch' on the Canyon-bottom, he wrote with excitement to Bob Buckingham (15 May 1947):

I am half way through a two days' ride on a mule called Monkey, so do not expect a normal letter. If it gets posted you will know that I have returned to the surface safely. The Canyon is one mile deep, and we zigzagged down 8 miles before we reached the Colorado or saw it – an incredible story-book river 400 ft across, the colour of cement, and so violent that when it passes a beach it throws up regular waves sideways like a sea. As a rule it is roaring between dark red precipices. . . . The picture above¹ – of the chaotic upper surface – gives no impression of the world hidden in the depths and throbbing with the mad river. I only decided to make the plunge an hour before the mules started. Thought it would be 'too much' for me, also bad weather. But the last named has only made the descent more romantic, storms and clouds doing occasional ballet-dances, and the sun returning. Our guide, James, rides first, I last, and he only knows me as 'Gentleman on Monkey'. He is a lean cinematographic cow-boy, not much interested in us, as why should he be? I should think a guide got bored with anyone, even the loveliest young girls. He has to help me on and off, am sorry to say. I can never remember *where* I am heavy, always assume it is my head . . . one can't write a letter about everything, so I had better try to tell you what the picture on this note paper looks like. Imagine a number of sphinxes, each over $\frac{1}{2}$ mile high, with white heads and draped in crimson shawls which usually leave their paws free. I can't do better for the Canyon than that, nor go on for the numerous objects which do not resemble sphinxes – a hill like this  which James calls a battleship or an extraordinary  like the lid of a giantess' work basket. All in a crack occurring in dull level country, small fir trees rather like Woking – crack from 1 to 14 miles across . . .

I hear music – James or someone strumming a guitar and looking handsome no doubt, but *must* go to bed now.

All sorts of water are rushing about outside in the dark and someone is singing.

From Colorado he travelled on to Berkeley, in California, to stay with Noel Voges, an American acquaintance acquired during the war,² and Voges' wife Marietta. Voges was now teaching in the

¹ i.e. on the hotel notepaper.

² Bob Buckingham and he had met by chance on the Thames riverside, and when Voges happened to mention his admiration for Forster's work, Bob had arranged an introduction.

Modern Languages department at the university. He proved to be an excellent host. Also, he interested Forster as a character, the under-privileged American who had 'made good' – most generous and kindly in practice, but hard and strength-worshipping in theory. 'He has an irritability towards weakness,' Forster noted, 'of which he is not proud but is too honest to conceal.' Apart from Voges, nothing in Forster's stay in California made a lasting impression on him. He found the West makeshift and rootless. 'No indigenous civilization to clamp it down. The Indians are thinnest ghosts, the Mexicans, who would clamp, too infrequent, Spain too phoney.'

There followed a series of immense train-journeys: over the Rockies to Salt Lake City; across the Great Plains to Chicago; and – for he had changed his mind about Niagara Falls – north across the border to Ontario. Scenically it was full of wonders for him, and he adjured himself to remember, especially, three sights:

- (i) the Moonlit Assyrian Bull seen by chance in the first ascent of the Rockies, so narrow it was, so tall, so sudden the light-change when we reached it, that I gasped as rarely (ii) a low doorway of cloudy light in the thunder cloud overhanging Salt Lake (iii) the V of the Great Plains . . . what beside it is the Rift Valley from Kenya?

He had been awed, too, by Boulder Dam, which had given him 'a vision of a transformed world'; and by a contrasting spectacle in the Arizona desert – an array of obsolete aircraft, thousand upon thousand of them, awaiting destruction. 'When you reflect that each plane carries a wireless set which will also be destroyed,' he wrote, 'you begin to realize the other side of the Spirit of America – the Spirit of Waste.' Certain oddities and surprises stayed with him as well: the five separate locks on his host's¹ door in Chicago, a lady Saint reeling drunk in the streets of Salt Lake City: and the chambermaid in the hotel there, who told him, when he offered her a tip, 'I don't like to take your money, brother; you need it more than I do.'

There were many invitations awaiting him on his return to New York, and during the next week or two he did much dining out and party-going, also giving several public readings and lectures. He made the acquaintance of Lionel Trilling, spending an evening with him and his wife Diana, during which they discussed – as Forster put

¹ Professor Morton Dauwen Zabel.

it – ‘the liberalism which stultifies itself in the name of liberalism’. Trilling arranged a lecture for him, then discovered it to be a ‘communist trap’ and persuaded him to withdraw. (‘I do hate traps,’ Forster wrote to Bob Buckingham, ‘I never know whether I ought to fall into them or not.’) He felt much respect for Trilling, and the Trillings were greatly charmed with him. They later recalled, particularly, one tiny incident. They had given him their young baby to hold, and, thinking to please the child, he had swept its face into a bunch of sweet-smelling lilacs. The baby had yelled with rage, and instantly his sole concern had been for the child, not even remotely for his own *amour-propre*.

While he was in the flat at St Luke’s Square he happened to read some stories, partly on homosexual themes, by a twenty-eight-year-old friend of Cadmus named Donald Windham. He was struck with them and got Cadmus to give him an introduction to Windham, who lived in New York, and he began with him one of those relationships of friendship, professional helpfulness and careful (sometimes severe) literary advice that he was skilled in.¹ Some years later he wrote an Introduction to Windham’s collection of stories *The Warm Country* (1960), saying that the most important thing about Windham was that he ‘believed in warmth’. ‘He knows that human beings are not statues but contain flesh and blood and a heart, and he believes that creatures so constituted must contact one another or they will decay.’²

The Indian ambassador to the U.S.A., Asaf Ali, an old acquaintance of Forster’s, had invited him to Washington, and during June he stayed for five days there in the Indian embassy. It gave him an experience – alarming to him – of the cocktail-party circuit ‘“To meet you meet you meet you” sings a bird outside my . . . window this early morning . . .’, he noted, ‘well symbolizing Washington Society’. He was treated with much attention at Washington parties – but often on the assumption that he was C. S. Forester, and he grew hardened to being thanked by strangers for his immortal Captain Hornblower.

It amazed him how deeply Washington was obsessed with the

¹ See *E. M. Forster’s Letters to Donald Windham* (Verona, 1975).

² He wrote, more equivocally, to Eric Fletcher (12 December 1960) that a friend (Ted Gillott) had liked the stories very much. ‘He thinks they are about people who gave themselves away too much. I think they are about people who gave themselves away too little.’

Russians. At a dinner at the embassy, given in his honour, one of the guests, a journalist, proposed the dropping of an atomic bomb on Russia without warning. 'Stone dead hath no fellow . . . That's good, isn't it Tom?' he called to another journalist, and the two shouted and chanted the phrase to each other for the rest of the evening. Forster was disgusted. 'Had not expected such an experience at Washington or in an embassy,' he noted disapprovingly

During his stay in Washington he visited the National Gallery, and, as a privilege, he was shown the treasures of the Kaiser Friedrich Museum of Berlin – removed by the American army from a salt-mine in the Russian zone and now kept in secrecy in a locked cellar. The sight of these imprisoned spoils impressed him. 'I have seen the great art-crime of the age,' he reflected. 'Napoleon's nothing to it'

Bill Roerick was at Tyringham, acting in a stock company, and Forster paid a return visit there, this time living in 'Lost Farm' itself. It was very rough and bare, reminding him of Clouds Hill. 'Don't let the ladies make it cottage-chintzy,' he told Roerick. 'They will want to.' The chores at the cottage were shared, Forster's being to fetch two pails of water each morning from the brook. The peace and loneliness pleased him, and he found something touching in this gentle, so-nearly English landscape. 'Saw a bobolink in the meadows,' he noted. 'What a quaint pet, and what a pretty song! How wrong the English have gone in their contempt of the American country scene and their denial of distinction.'

These last days in America were a happy time for him. He had felt he had 'had the America he wanted' and reflected, gratefully, how much he had been cosseted by his American friends – perhaps too much for his own good. He was loth to go and told himself at moments, especially on waking, that he had nothing to go back to. Paul Cadmus came to New York to see him off and shopped and packed for him, while he gave another interview and had his portrait drawn by Bernard Perkin. He took the plane home on 12 July 1947, with no expectation of ever returning. 'Last night in the kindest of lands,' he noted. 'Last night on earth always a possibility too.'

12 Writing Again

The life in Cambridge to which he returned began to present attractions. He had been accustomed to say that Cambridge was a place for the very young or the very old, and now that he was old he found that in many ways it suited him well. He was looked after; he was among friends; he knew the way of life and loved the city and its buildings, and at his age it was convenient, though it had its disadvantages, to live somewhere he might easily be visited. The idea of finding a house elsewhere gradually faded.

A new element had entered his life: the duties belonging to great fame. His daily post was enormous: there poured in invitations and requests for interviews, letters of praise or abuse from strangers, begging letters, business letters (for he employed no agent), theses on him sent for his comments, or books sent, unsolicited, for him to autograph. He found it a curse, and he reproached himself for idleness in answering, but it went with a stream of public praise and affection, for which he was grateful.

Now that he was known to reside in Cambridge, many people were burning to meet him. He was an object of pilgrimage, particularly, for visiting Indians. This pleased him, and he made several valued friends in this way, though also acquiring one or two pests or parasites, on whom he would keep a 'file'. He was very generous towards Indian acquaintances, often helping them with money and writing numerous prefaces to books by Indian writers.¹

The young generally were eager for his acquaintance. Some of them sought it out of curiosity, as one might want to see the Pope or the

¹ For instance to *Hali* by G. V. Desani (1950), *Maura* by Huthi Singh (1951) and *Zohra* by Zeenuth Futehally (1951).

Pyramids; others out of lion-hunting; and others again to sit at his feet, or consult him as an oracle, or bring him their personal problems. All this seemed very natural to him, and he was skilful in dealing with it. He felt he had duties in the matter. In his books, he had played the mentor or sage, so it was to be expected that in life also he should be sought after as a sage, and indeed he thought he had wisdom, though he did not believe it could be communicated.¹ He knew, too, that – to a rather special degree – people fell in love with him through his books. Admittedly, the person they fell in love with in this way was to some extent imaginary. Still, he had wanted this love and felt it wrong to reject it

Further, he had not given up wanting new friendships, especially with young men, and his fame helped him in making new ones. At about the time, he struck up a very warm friendship with a King's undergraduate named Eric Fletcher, a miner's son from Doncaster. He wrote about Fletcher to William Plomer (7 November 1948), in the early days of their acquaintance: 'He's working class (very much so in his speech) . . . I like him for his outlook as well as for himself – humanist, humanitarian, openly agnostic, whereas most people up here, young or old, hedge, and sometimes turn into quick set hedges.' Fletcher, for his part, became greatly devoted to Forster. He left Cambridge in 1948, marrying and becoming Principal of a Teachers' Training College. Forster and he continued to meet and stay with each other, and over the coming years, Forster wrote him several hundred letters of gossip, affection and advice.

Among the senior members of the College, Forster had acquired one close friend, Kenneth Harrison – a mathematician, and lay Dean of the College – generous, warm-hearted and freakish in his conversation. Apart from this, his relations with the King's dons were affectionate but unintimate, and he would sometimes rebuke himself for not contributing more to college life. He suspected that the smarter dons avoided him, finding him too uninteresting despite his fame – 'so distinguished yet so undistinguished'. One evening he caused amusement by playing *Patience* in the Combination Room. 'They liked seeing me do something,' he noted. 'I do too little and bore

¹ He noted in his Commonplace Book in 1943: '*Wisdom*, when acquired, proves incommunicable and useless and goes with our learning into the grave. The edges of it occasionally impinge on people, though, and strike a little awe into them.'

them.' The present Provost of the College was J. T. Sheppard, a friend of Forster's from undergraduate days.¹ He was by now rather a vain old man, with Quilp-like body and flowing white locks – a figure much revered by strangers to Cambridge, but in private teasing and malicious, Forster would have little brushes with him from time to time, and would dissect his character in his diary. Sheppard made a cult of Bob Buckingham, doing him many real kindnesses and declaring loudly, for the benefit of his colleagues, 'if half my dons were as intelligent as you we should have a most splendid College!' Bob considered the Provost a great friend, but Forster suspected him of devious motives.

The chief objection to great fame, Forster was finding, was that it helped to keep him idle. 'Being an important person is a full time job,' he reflected, 'and is bound to generate *some* inward futility and pretentiousness. "You need not do any thing – you've arrived." And I don't.' There were those who spotted his indolence. Simon Raven, who came up to King's as an undergraduate at about this time, wrote later, in a caustic article,² that 'Morgan Forster was (or seemed to be) bone idle . . . He was for ever pottering from nowhere in particular to nowhere else, so that very often, if he happened on friends by the way, he would turn round and go wherever they were going instead.'

Forster wished dearly that he could settle to some solid piece of work, while he was still capable of it, and one project he considered intermittently was that he should write up his Dewas experiences, or at least such part of them as was publishable. He felt that the moment to do so had come; and during 1948 he had his letters from Dewas typed and wrote to Darling asking for his own reminiscences of that 'vanished magic and muddle'.

* * *

He still kept up an active London existence and, most weeks, would spend a day or two in his Chiswick flat, seeing friends. Always he would travel with a small Gladstone bag, which would contain his pyjamas (usually not a pair), a sponge, and, for his breakfast, a screw of melting butter, an egg (wrapped up in his socks), and some bread (or he might be intending to ask some friend for 'a bit of bread'). All his travelling in London, whatever the weather or the hour, would be

¹ His Apostles paper, 'King's or Trinity', may, I have suggested, have had some influence on *The Longest Journey*. (See Vol. 1, pp. 104-7.)

² 'The Strangeness of E. M. Forster', *Spectator*, 5 September 1970.

done by Tube or bus, taxis being in his view a vulgar extravagance.

The friends he would most regularly see were Joe Ackerley and the Buckinghams. There had been a change in Ackerley. Some time in 1945 his deserter friend, X—, had been arrested – as it so happened, by Bob Buckingham – and had been sent to prison. Ackerley had done all he could for X—,¹ forming an uneasy alliance with X—'s wife over prison visits, and going regularly to see his parents. On one of these later occasions he had seen and taken pity on X—'s dog, a beautiful young Alsatian bitch named Queenie. No one in the household took Queenie for walks, so he had volunteered to do so himself, journeying at weekends all the way from Putney to east London for the purpose, and this had had a curious sequel, for his affections had gradually transferred themselves from X— to the dog. Eventually he had bought her from X—, and she had revolutionized his life. No longer during the office day did his mind run on the evening's chase, but on the welcome awaiting him from Queenie – on her walk, the problem of food for her supper, her sex-life and her ailments. It was a bother to Ackerley's friends – if only because Queenie, who was possessive and hysterical, barked ceaselessly in company, wrecking all attempts at conversation.* Forster was both worried and irritated by Joe's obsession. ('Just off to lunch with doggy Joe, and hope he will bore *and shock* me less than he did last time,' he wrote to Sprott during 1946.) He was gentle about it to Ackerley, but very occasionally teased him: Ackerley, on one occasion asked how any one could enjoy seeing a baby, 'except its fond parents', to which Forster replied 'Considering how *some* people dislike *some* animals, your rejection of all babies is somewhat of a challenge.' Once, when Queenie barked at Forster's landlady, he broke out 'That *bloody* dog!' but instantly apologized to Joe, saying earnestly 'But it was so *rude*.'

* * *

For some years Forster had not been active in the National Council for Civil Liberties. Friends like Leonard Woolf had continued to warn him about its Communist leanings, and an incident at the annual

¹ His friends had the greatest difficulty in preventing him from appearing in court and making dramatic appeals on X—'s behalf – which, as they told him, would infallibly give a homosexual flavour to the affair, would probably earn X— a heavier sentence, and might very well land him in gaol too.

general meeting in March 1948 finally brought him round to their opinion. The Government had recently announced a purge of Communists from the civil service, and at the meeting a motion condemning this action had been passed, amid a good deal of cheering and howling-down of objectors. Forster made it the occasion to resign, on the grounds that the motion was not a civil liberties one but a political one. His letter to the *New Statesman* announcing his decision (15 May 1948) was a mild one, saying he resigned only 'after careful consideration and with much regret' and paying tribute to the memory of Ronald Kidd.

* * *

During the summer of this year the first Aldeburgh Festival took place, and Forster was invited by Benjamin Britten to give a lecture at it, on the poet George Crabbe. There was a curious history behind the invitation. Britten and Forster had known each other since the days of *The Ascent of F.6* (see p. 213), and, through a happy accident, Forster had had considerable influence on Britten's career. Britten had followed Auden to America in 1939, planning to apply for American citizenship, but by 1941 he had begun to feel doubts about his decision. In this mood of uncertainty, he had happened to pick up a copy of the *Listener*, containing an article by Forster on Crabbe. It began 'To think of Crabbe is to think of England.' To Britten, who had been born in Crabbe's part of Suffolk, it had come home intensely, and it had precipitated his decision to return to England. It had also set him reading Crabbe, especially the poem 'Peter Grimes' which Forster had discussed in his article, and when, shortly afterwards, he received a grant from the Koussevitsky Foundation to write an opera, he chose 'Peter Grimes' as a subject.

Since Britten's return from America, the two had occasionally met and had corresponded. At a National Gallery Concert in 1944 Forster had heard Britten and Peter Pears perform Britten's *Michelangelo Sonnets* and had been much impressed, buying himself records of the work. Hearing of this, Britten had presented him with a score, and a year or two later he made Forster the present of a gramophone, with an admiring inscription. It was agreed that, for the Festival, Forster should stay with Britten and Pears at their house in Aldeburgh. He went a few days in advance of the opening, to do some exploration of the Crabbe countryside, and in the evenings Britten and Pears played and sang for him and improvised musical parodies

at the piano. He was enchanted by his whole stay and told Plomer that his hosts were 'the sweetest people'. The lecture that he gave was on 'George Crabbe and *Peter Grimes*', and in it he speculated as to what sort of opera *Peter Grimes* would have been if he had been the librettist. Certainly a rather different affair, he said; it would have been more faithful to Crabbe and would have featured ghosts, hell-fire and a spine-chilling curtain-scene like the one in *Don Giovanni*.

* * *

During the autumn of 1948 Forster fell into depression – one of the acutest depressions of his life. There were a number of factors contributing. He was nearly seventy, thus on the threshold of old age. He was still obsessed by his 'homelessness' and his 'expulsion' from Abinger. He felt unproductive and, as it were, living from hand to mouth intellectually. And, as happened from time to time, there was a hitch in his friendship with Bob Buckingham. Earlier in the year, he had helped the Buckinghams buy a house in Shepherd's Bush, but since then, Bob – or so Forster thought – had been 'boorish' and ungracious and had neglected him. The thought gnawed him that he could no longer interest or impress Bob. The perennial fear of his life, constantly dispelled and constantly returning, was that his imaginative life should dry up; but under this, and allied to it, lay a worse fear – that he should lose the power to feel about people or take interest in them. He had evoked this fear in *A Passage to India*, when depicting Mrs Moore's collapse after her visit to the Marabar caves, and it now took hold of him. 'I open this book in fulfilment of a vow,' he wrote miserably in his diary for 8 October.

After three miserable days in London I believed that I must address myself. For I cannot speak to others of my worst trouble, which is that I have got tired of people and personal relationships. I don't avoid people who are in my way, but I want to see no one – except Rosie, E. K. Bennett and Bob, and the young who are different. Unless I can manage to settle down to some work this year, I may go wrong in my head. I feel so desolate and useless, and observant people see it in my face. A 'red-Indian' slapped me on the arm in Tottenham Court Road saying 'be cheerful.' . . . Part of my disintegration is old age, over which I need not waste time. Will self-communing check the other part? . . . I am writing this in No. 3 Trumpington Street, one of my many unsatisfactory 'homes'. It has not brought me nearer to myself so far. I feel scared. If human beings have failed me, what is left?

The desolation soon left him, and it was never to return with such acuteness. By December he was recording that he had been very happy lately. Bob Buckingham was affectionate once more, and the world seemed conspiring to treat him with kindness and flattery. For his seventieth birthday Plomer and Ackerley organized a party in a Soho restaurant, inviting various of his closest friends.¹ There were birthday tributes to him in the papers, and many private letters. Bennett wrote to him:

To me you are my *wise* friend as well as being my loving friend, and this being a suitable occasion I want to say how much my life owes to you . . . it is not only the 'me' of today but also the poor boy to whom you were kind forty years ago who thanks you now.

Forster told himself that the word had gone round that 'I am old and must be spoilt.'

* * *

There was a further reason for his contentment. Britten, so it seemed, had remembered the half-conscious hint he had dropped in his Aldeburgh lecture. Since then, Britten had been invited to write an opera for the Festival of Britain, and he suggested they should collaborate. Forster was greatly excited at the prospect. At first he hesitated, feeling his lack of theatrical experience. However, then it was suggested that he should have a helper, Eric Crozier – an experienced librettist and man of the theatre who had already collaborated with Britten on an opera² – and at this, he accepted. It was exactly the stimulus he needed. And, as it proved, it was the beginning for him of ten or so very contented and productive years.

It remained to find a subject for the opera: and after a good deal of fruitless discussion, Britten and Forster, almost simultaneously, hit on the idea of Herman Melville's *Billy Budd*. It seemed to them, instantly, the right, the perfect choice. They sent a telegram to Crozier, summoning him to them at Aldeburgh; and when Crozier suggested difficulties, pointing out that it meant an exclusively male cast, they were too impatient to listen.

Crozier overcame his doubts, and Forster found him an admirable

¹ The guests were Anwar Masood and his wife, the Buckinghams, the Wilkinsons, Rose Macaulay, Elizabeth Poston, Hugh Meredith, E. K. Bennett, Sebastian Sprott and his friend Charles Lovett, and John Simpson.

² He wrote the libretto of *Albert Herring* (1947).

collaborator. Together, in the course of sixteen days at Britten's house¹ in March 1949, they roughed out a good deal of a first draft of the libretto. Melville's story concerns a handsome and innocent-hearted naval rating, Billy Budd, hanged for striking and accidentally killing his persecutor, a malevolent petty officer, Claggart. As Melville wrote it, the weight lies not so much on Billy as on the ship's captain, Vere, who, though knowing Billy's innocence, feels it his duty to condemn him. The problem Forster and Crozier set themselves, Forster told Plomer, was to 'rescue Vere from Melville', that is to say to correct Melville's excessive respect for authority and discipline, as embodied in Captain Vere – in fact to make Billy the hero rather than Vere. Apart from this major change, Forster decided to make one important addition to Melville's text: a soliloquy or *credo* for Billy's persecutor, Claggart. In writing it, he took a hint from a remark made by William Plomer, in a preface to Melville's story,² to the effect that 'natural depravity' is not the same as absolute evil. 'We were anxious to avoid competition with Iago's monologue in Verdi's *Otello*,' he told Plomer (10 March 1949), 'and this aids us – Iago being absolutely evil, and quite chirpy in consequence.' He was pleased at his monologue, thinking it his best achievement as a librettist. It was a grand-opera effect; and in general he thought in terms of grand opera, being anxious, he told Britten (20 November 1948) that the work should be mounted 'clearly and grandly' – 'I seem to have the fear of a lot of symbolic and inexpensive scenery.'

In May, Forster went for a second and briefer visit to America. He went this time with Bob Buckingham, staying at 'Lost Farm' and in Greenwich Village and revisiting Hamilton College to receive an honorary degree. On his return he at once resumed work on the opera, and by August he and Crozier had completed their first draft, altering it from a three-act to a four-act shape. He was enjoying the experience of creation and felt a growing excitement about the work. 'An enormous amount of stuff has got caught and fixed,' he told Ackerley (21 August 1949), 'partly out of Melville, partly out of the inversions of his absurdities.' Britten, as usual with him, was involved in half-a-dozen other projects and had not yet begun composing. Forster grew impatient: 'I do wish Ben would get on,' he would remark fretfully to Crozier. However, at this point, his plans fell into confusion, for

¹ Crag House, overlooking the seafront.

² Introduction to *Billy Budd* (John Lehmann, 1947).

he had a revival of his old prostate trouble and was told he must have another operation. His chief regret, when he heard this, was that he might be leaving *Billy Budd* unfinished.

The operation was fixed for December, in a nursing-home in Sloane Square, and May Buckingham volunteered to come in to the nursing-home and act as his nurse. The gesture touched and delighted him and became another bond between them. It was also fortunate, for – or so his doctor told him afterwards – by her quickness in reporting some symptom she saved his life.

For his convalescence, Britten had invited him to Aldeburgh. He stayed there some months, being looked after with much tenderness by Britten. By now Britten had begun work on the opera, and, as soon as Forster's strength returned, the two worked on it together, doing several very productive weeks of work. As recreation they would sometimes go sailing in the boat of a fisherman friend, Bill Burrell, a handsome and good-natured young man with a 'noble, savage' quality faintly evocative of Billy Budd's. (In later years, Forster would sometimes go to stay with Burrell and his wife.)

The friendship of Forster and Britten had been a quick and intense one, and these weeks were, in a sense, its peak. Soon minor frictions began to develop. Forster, feeling himself fruitfully employed at last, could not understand Britten's breaking off at every moment to play in concerts or attend conferences. Vexed by this, he left Aldeburgh rather earlier than he had planned; and soon afterwards, on a visit of Britten's to Cambridge, he got it into his head that Britten had treated him off-handedly and told him so very sharply. (Crozier, who was present, was astonished at his fierceness; 'he berated him [Britten] like a schoolboy,' he related.) There was a mild estrangement for a time, repaired partly through Crozier's efforts. Forster blamed himself for his part in it. 'I am rather a fierce old man at the moment,' he confessed to his diary (31 December 1950), 'and he is rather a spoilt boy, and certainly a busy one.'

A little later there was a further jar between them. Forster, who in general thought the *Billy Budd* music magnificent, wrote to Britten criticizing the setting of Claggart's monologue. He said:

It is my most important piece of writing and I did not, at my first hearing, feel it sufficiently important musically . . . I want *passion* – love constricted, perverted, poisoned, but never the less *flowing* down its agonizing channel; a sexual discharge gone evil. Not

soggy depression or growling remorse. I seemed turning from one musical discomfort to another, and was dissatisfied. I looked for an aria perhaps, for a more recognizable form.

Britten, though Forster did not know this, was intensely touchy about criticism and, as Forster heard from Crozier, was badly offended by the letter. Forster made efforts to repair his mistake, and before long matters were mended. By now he felt certain they were engaged upon a masterpiece.

* * *

He was at Aldeburgh again several times during 1951, and in June, while climbing the belfry of the parish church, he fell and broke his ankle. It was quite a serious fracture. With his foot in plaster, and being unhandy with crutches, he was left more or less helpless by it, and the Buckinghams insisted, for the moment, on his coming to live with them. It was several months before he could walk again, and, as May Buckingham recalled, he was a bad invalid. Annoyed that the specialist was, as he thought, neglecting him, he asked May to make a boot to go over his plaster, to get him walking again. 'Well, I made the boot as instructed,' she related, 'and was trying it on, and Morgan got absolutely furious and threw the boot at me. And he never learned to use his crutches. Rose Macaulay came, and "It's easy, Morgan," she said, and she was going up and down the room, showing him how easy it was – but he never tried. We've got those crutches still.'

To occupy himself in his helpless state, Forster turned his mind to his projected book of Indian memoirs. It was a difficult task in some ways. The material was delicate politically and bristling with libel dangers. Also, he would not be able to discuss his own sexual escapades – not that he wanted to do so, for their own sake; but it was they that brought him closest to the Maharaja and were his grounds for considering him a saint. This was a weakness that the book must always suffer; and, despite it, *The Hill of Devi* gradually began to take shape. He sought and obtained much advice from Darling, and, to his good fortune, Darling managed to find a graphic letter written by himself from Pondicherry, describing the Maharaja in his despair and exile. Forster felt happy to be dwelling upon Dewas, a place which still had mystery for him. He wrote to Darling: 'Sometimes I think of Dewas as a hole going down (beneficently) to the centre of the earth.'

The end of 1951 was a little peak of fame for him. During the past

year he had assembled a new collection of his reviews and essays, under the title of *Two Cheers for Democracy*, and this was published in November, gaining a particularly enthusiastic and admiring reception. There was a feeling that, over the last decades, he had somehow kept his nerve better than most of his contemporaries. Reviewers praised the cunning of his style and his strategies. Jocelyn Brooke, in the *Spectator* (9 November 1951), wrote that 'The oblique, sinuous sentences worm their way into one's mind, apparently so off-hand, yet carrying a weight of meaning which seems disproportionate to their spare and elegant scaffolding.' V. S. Pritchett, in the *New Statesman* (13 November 1951) noted: 'The streak of personal inadequacy is carefully, cunningly put in, the astutely dated slang plays its part in the masked battery of weakness.' The reviewers were agreed, too, in recognizing a new firmness in his tone. 'He is consistent, he is tough,' wrote P. H. Newby in the *Listener* (1 November 1951), 'he is quite unlike the person described under his name in the *Concise Cambridge History of English Literature* as being "at heart a scholar" whose work has a "shy unworldly quality".'

The following month, the première of *Billy Budd* took place at Covent Garden. It had a generally enthusiastic, if not rapturous, reception, several critics praising Britten's genius for creating 'music of the sea' though one or two others complaining of his failure at this, many complimenting Forster and Crozier on the intelligence and distinction of their libretto but some others accusing it of a lack of dramatic life.

* * * *

In 1951 Bob Buckingham reached the police retiring age. He was only fifty, young enough to begin a new career and, with Forster's encouragement, he decided he would try to get into the probation service. It turned out, there was some prejudice against ex-policemen in the service, but Forster used his influence with Margery Fry and others, and Buckingham was accepted for training. However, when, two years later, he came to apply for jobs, he was told that he could not be employed in London, and as a result he had to take a post in Coventry. This was a blow for Forster. During his long stay in the Buckinghams' house, he had come to think of it as a home, and since then he had often come to stay there, and the house had become a meeting-place for his friends. Each summer, since 1951, the Buckinghams and he had thrown a large party there, and streams of famous

people had filled the garden at Wendell Road. It now seemed that, once again, he was to lose a home. At first he was against Buckingham taking the job. For the last time in their lives, there was a fierce quarrel between him and May Buckingham, and when she and Bob began house-hunting in Coventry, he began to reclaim this or that piece of his furniture from them, declaring that it had only been lent. His resentment quickly subsided, and when, near the end of 1953, they found a house, he helped them very handsomely in buying it, as well as towards buying a car. Very soon he was paying them frequent visits in their new home, a semi-detached house in the Coventry suburbs. He told Plomer that it was very nice – if one didn't look out of the windows, for the garden 'forecast an allotment in hell'.

At about the same time he had to give up his rooms with the Wilkinsons in Cambridge. In lieu of them, the College gave him a bedroom, but he felt it as one more dispossession. 'I see my furniture everywhere, my home nowhere,' he lamented. By this time, his friends were feeling he made too much of his homelessness, and eventually Bob Buckingham attacked him on it, telling him he was making himself unhappy to no purpose. He took the advice to heart, and, with some pangs, he now made a formal renunciation of 'homes' and 'roots in the land'.

* * *

He was by this time a grand old man of letters and might expect to receive national honours. A year or two before, he had been offered a knighthood but had refused it, telling his friends that 'it wasn't good enough for him'.¹ In 1952, however, he was approached by the Palace with the offer of a C.H. This seemed to him more suitable, and he accepted, remarking in his letter that he preferred honours that came after his name. The award was announced in the New Year's Honours for 1953, and he went to Buckingham Palace for the investiture the following month. It was quite a lengthy audience, in the course of which the Queen said how sad it was he had published no book for so long – upon which he politely corrected

¹ He took an independent line towards honours. On one occasion he was informed by Oxford that an honorary degree was to be bestowed on him and that he should present himself to receive it on such-and-such a day. He considered the tone of this presumptuous and replied that he must refuse the honour, since it would not be convenient for him to be in Oxford on that day.

her. As he left, he brandished the insignia to an equerry, exclaiming brightly 'Well, I got my little toy,' and was received with freezing glances. They failed to chill him, and he returned to Cambridge in a glow of loyalty, declaring that if the Queen had been a boy he would have fallen in love with her. Lengthy accounts of the occasion were sent to his aunts Nellie and Rosalie and the maid Agnes.

Once or twice every year he would pay a nostalgic visit to Abinger, to take a distant view of West Hackhurst and to call on Bone the gardener. Rose Macaulay, an old friend and author of a book about him,¹ drove him there for his mother's birthday in February 1952. They took flowers to the churchyard, and Rose was amused at his method with them. 'He was rather nice,' she wrote to a friend.²

He distributed sprays of mimosa also to the graves of his aunt, close by, and other deceased acquaintances, according to their deserts, taking some away when he recalled tiresome things they had once done, and being very careful to raise no jealousies; it seems that even in the grave, feuds rage in country villages.

With his renunciation of 'homes' and 'roots', his chagrin and obsession over West Hackhurst faded, and with it his resentment against the Farrers; when he heard of a suicide in their family, he felt a twinge of guilt at ever having wished them harm. At the time, his expulsion had offended his family pride. And now pride – or at any rate interest – in his Thornton ancestors grew in him, and he renewed connection with one or two surviving Thornton relatives. He discovered that his cousin Sir Hugh Thornton and Sir Hugh's wife May also took an interest in family history, and he exchanged information with them and went with them on expeditions to Clapham. Meanwhile he was still burrowing through his mass of old letters and papers, puzzling as to what to keep and what to destroy. The letters were mostly very dull, but – as he felt increasingly – they represented a tradition, and though he rejected patriotism and had renounced 'roots in the land', he believed in tradition. He also believed in, and had a deep imaginative feeling for, inheritance and post-humous influence. As he read, the character of his great-aunt Marianne impressed him more and more, and he began to speculate about her

¹ *The Writings of E. M. Forster* (1938) He did not think very highly of it.

² See Rose Macaulay, *Letters to a Friend*, ed. C. Babington-Smith (1961), p. 261.

influence on him. Her legacy had, at any rate in the material sense, been the making of his career as a novelist, and the inheritance could be seen in a spiritual aspect too. There was a theme here: how, through Aunt Monie's love and hopes for him, so Philistine a family as the Thorntons should in the end have produced an artist. He saw his way to a substantial book, and, during 1953, having completed *The Hill of Devi*,¹ he set to work upon it. In form, it developed into a fourfold biography of Marianne Thornton: as Daughter, Sister, Aunt and Great-Aunt. Houses loomed large in it; and as he came to write of the time in the 1850s when, through family disputes, the house in Battersea Rise had stood vacant, he composedly drew a parallel with his own experience.

They did not know whether they wished the house to be sold and to vanish off the spiritual face of the earth, or to stand as it was, an empty and dishonoured shell. I understand many of their feelings: it has so happened that I have been deprived of a house myself. They will not be understood by the present generation.²

¹ It was published in October 1953.

² *Marianne Thornton* (1956), p. 188.

13 E. M. Forster Described

I got to know Forster myself early in 1947, a few months after he had arrived in Cambridge. I was then twenty-seven and had just become a fellow of Emmanuel College. We met at the Apostles, and a day or two after our first encounter he called on me in my rooms, uninvited. It was a sort of 'apostolic' visit, very charmingly conducted, on his part, and on the strength of it, during the coming year, we got on to terms of friendship. I left Cambridge a few years later, to work in London, but we continued to meet and to correspond; and eventually, a year or two before his death, he asked me if I would like to write a book about him.

I will try in this chapter to describe him as he was when I first knew him. It is easiest to picture him in his College room. This was on the first staircase of the front court of King's: a spacious, high-ceilinged room with tall Victorian-gothic windows, looking out on to a little inner court. The first thing that caught one's eye in the room was the mantelpiece, designed by his father,¹ an elaborate oaken structure with blue china in its niches and, on its topmost shelf, some vases and three large beaten-copper platters. Above it hung portraits and engravings of his Thornton ancestors, by George Richmond and others,* and in front stood a long sofa with a padded rail, rather shabby, flanked by two William Morris armchairs, also shabby, and swathed in knitted shawls.² Behind these were a mahogany dining-

¹ It was presumably designed for Forster's parents' house in Melcombe Place and accompanied him all his life, being transported from one home to another.

* They were knitted, or rather crocheted, by Sebastian Sprott, who learned crocheting from Lady Ottoline Morrell.

table,¹ an upright piano and a tree-standing mahogany bookcase,² containing handsome, unread-looking, morocco-bound volumes, and round the walls ran other assorted bookcases, some solid and Victorian, others cheap modern shelving. On the right as you entered there was a fine Georgian bureau; near it hung an imitation 'Turner'³ of a castle on a lake, in a heavy gilt frame; and over the further door was a framed reproduction of Picasso's 'Boy leading a horse'. On the tables and ledges, about the room, lay a variety of ornaments and knickknacks: Bidar-work pots and trays, painted-leather runners, Victorian posy-glasses, a Zoëtrope and a solitaire-board.

It was a charming room, full of objects but not cluttered, untidy but not disorderly, settled but changing a little from month to month as a table or vase was shifted, a picture rehung or some new gift or memento exhibited or put away. When one called on Forster, one would generally find him in the further armchair, a tiny vase of flowers at his side, a shawl over his knees if it were winter, and letters, opened and unopened, strewn in quantities round him. There would be a moment of doubt or suspicion, until he recognized the visitor, and then a very warm, solicitous welcome, decorated by airy mutterings. 'How are you, Morgan?' 'I am functioning with great precision, though coldified. An *excellent* instrument . . .' He would throw himself back in his chair, in rather a sack-like way, and address himself benevolently, with an air of leisure, to conversation. There might be a pause at this point. Pauses played a considerable part in his conversation.

He was a fairly large and plumpish man, dressed ordinarily in a dowdy suit, cheap shirt and nonedescript tie. Straggling hair, broad brow, a long reddish nose, and under it a wispy moustache; fine eyes, in steel-rimmed glasses, and a most expressive and sensitive mouth, by turns tremulous, amused, morally reproving or full of scorn. It was the mouth, one felt, of a man defending the right to be sensitive. Physically he was awkward, limp and stiff at the same time. He would stand rather askew, as it were holding himself together by

¹ It was the nursery table from Battersea Rise.

² The bookcase, and its contents, had belonged to his grandfather, Charles Forster, and is described by Forster in his essay 'In My Library' in *Two Cheers for Democracy*.

³ It was painted by Forster's great-great-uncle John Whichelo and had been given to Forster's mother by Henry Festing Jones.

gripping his left hand in his right. By contrast his gestures were most graceful; he had a beautiful blessing gesture of the hand, and a curious and charming habit, when drinking tea, of describing a little circling motion with the cup. On occasion, if he happened to be touched or grateful, he would kiss a friend's hand with great beauty of manner.

With a little pushing, on such a visit as I am describing, he could be got chatting freely, and, in a desultory way, his conversation would range widely – though always with lapses and hiatuses. Suddenly, he would let a subject drop, whereupon no effort could revive it. There would be a good deal of mild gossip, in exactly the same style whether one knew the characters in the story or not. These stories, dramatizing some absurd little scene or contretemps, were very funny and living, and, at the end, he would explode with laughter himself; he laughed as if it hurt him, convulsed, giving a wail from a mirthless face. Sometimes, after some ridiculous tale, he would hang his head in pretended despair, with a cry of 'Oh!' – meaning, 'What *was* there to be done?'¹ Whatever the subject his talk had odd glints and tiny surprises in it, a queer precision of vocabulary, a perpetual slight displacement of the expected emphasis. The voice went into the air with charm and decision: a minute pause, and then a beautifully-formed, idiosyncratic phrase or just-hinted comic idea. 'Did you do any acting when you were young, Morgan?' 'No never – I – no, that wasn't acting – I played the triangle once . . .'²

There was always a great quickness in his response: not so much quickness of wit, though he could be witty, but quickness in 'placing' someone else's remark, in instantly seeing its drift, its motive, its upshot. His mind would race so quickly round the remark, that the topic was exhausted as soon as begun. As a part of this trait, he had a peculiar faculty for listening. Many acquaintances, throughout his life, remarked how intently he listened – seeming to attend not so much to what was said as to the underlying meaning or drift.³ It

¹ For instance, he had 'been told' to laugh at a certain film, and had done so, being rebuked for it by a foreigner in a nearby seat ('We do not share your humour.') At the end of the film, the foreigner told him that now he regretted not having laughed himself. 'Oh!' exclaimed Forster relating it, hanging his head.

² Scrap recorded by Eardley Knollys.

J. R. Ackerley, in his memoir *E. M. Forster: a Portrait* (1970), wrote:
. when I was alone with him and his unselfconscious listening attention

gave a special virtue to friendship with him, but for the un-self-confident it could be unnerving, and they would often find their words freezing on their lips.

He was at his best in a *tête-à-tête*. In company, even among close friends, he could be taciturn and would spark up only intermittently. He did not make much effort in general conversation, also he would never argue. Among strangers, though courteous, he could on occasion be very blank, shades of boredom and simulated benignity fitting over his face as he spoke, very carefully, of trivialities. Sometimes strangers found him altogether disappointing; others were charmed by him but could remember nothing he had said.

He had certain rather oriental forms of courtesy. Once he called on me, carrying a large bunch of flowers intended for someone else, and when I praised the flowers he instantly felt bound to give them to me; whereupon, of course, I was faced with the problem of finding him some more flowers. He would listen complaisantly to any suggestion, however preposterous, and only afterwards, and by faint indications, convey that perhaps, just possibly, someone might be urged against it. Similarly, he would gravely consider, or seem to consider, the most hackneyed remarks about his own work – for instance, that there were too many sudden deaths in *The Longest Journey* – as if he were hearing them for the first time. This courtesy of his went together, however, with some unnerving plain speaking. Once a fellow-guest at a party, having conversed with him for some time, remarked 'But I mustn't keep you from more distinguished guests.' 'No, you mustn't,' replied Forster.¹

At any social gathering in these late days, he was exposed to much adulation and lionization. It was a phenomenon he understood very well, and he did not pretend to think it strange that people, especially the young, should reverence him or feel awe at meeting him. It could grow tiresome, however, and he developed ways of deflecting it. For instance, at a party, he might single out some stranger and spend most of the evening in quiet conversation with him. He would choose the stranger because he or she attracted him, or because the stranger

was turned upon me – an attention which, I felt, was hearing not only the thing said but the motive in saying it – I experienced a sense of strain, as though more and better were expected of me than I really believed myself to contain. To be *really* listened to is a very serious matter.'

¹ Anecdote related of a friend by Arthur Crook.

looked lonely – and if the latter, it was done partly to shame his host or hostess. Whatever the motive, however, when he set out to please in this way, he did it whole-heartedly, occasionally getting snubbed for his pains – which enraged him greatly – but often making a new friend. These and similar habits of behaviour earned him a reputation for humility, and many anecdotes circulated of his ‘humbleness’ and unassumingness. It was in a sense a misunderstanding, for he had a very accurate idea of his own worth and was not slow to resent slights upon it. The truth was, rather, that he was modest – that is to say, had profoundly good manners, manners that were the fruit of his lifetime of moral self-cultivation.

The central preoccupation of his life, it was plain to see, was friendship, and he had a rather special attitude towards friendship. He never casually dropped friends, as most people do, out of forgetfulness or through change of circumstance – though, as has been seen, he might drop one with perfect deliberateness, if the friend had offended him in some vital way; and when this happened, he was unforgiving. Otherwise, if someone became a friend of his, he might expect to remain so for life, though perhaps gravitating over the years from one grade of his friendships to another. He believed – literally, and as more than a sentimental cliché – that the true history of the human race was the history of human affection. And for this reason it was a principle with him to keep his friendships in mind and to be continually reflecting on them. Also, to the end of his life, he was on the look-out for new friends and showed great enterprise in finding them.

He was frequently described as ‘shy’, but this too was a misnomer. What was certainly true was that he was timid: that is to say, he did not like to be hurt and took elaborate precautions not to be hurt. He was, and wished to be, sensitive; and since sensitiveness made him vulnerable, he had equipped himself with innumerable defensive weapons. He could withdraw into himself, be evasive, be over-polite, be silent and let others flounder. On extreme occasions he could speak out angrily, and his anger was frightening – but it did not often come to this, for he was not easily cornered. And all these defences could be lowered, he was not encased in Edwardian courtesy and could play the fool and laughed delightedly at plain speaking. He did not avoid intimacies, indeed he courted them. On the other hand, he did, remorselessly *manage* them and was not ready to ‘give himself’

unreservedly in friendship. For one thing, he greatly disliked being laughed at. He would swallow it sometimes, for friendship's sake, but for him it was no part at all of the pleasures of friendship, and he winced and bristled so visibly under teasing that people did not usually try it twice. Equally, as has been seen, he was bad at quarrels – that is to say, they assumed too vast proportions for him. He nerved himself up to a quarrel with painful effort and remembered it for years afterwards, still brooding about it at intervals and perhaps keeping a *dossier* on it. He had curious ways of describing a quarrel. If he were not involved personally, he spoke as though he were – 'Tom got angry with Bill, and then we were all in trouble . . .' And if he were involved personally, he would put the whole thing between inverted commas. 'I have been *insulted*' he might say, as if he had only just thought of the name for what had taken place. He could not conceive of quarrels as a natural part of a relationship, and when married friends, like the Buckinghams, had a quarrel, he felt sure their marriage must be breaking up. There was great sense of duty, and great loyalty and benevolence, in his relationships, but also something self-pleasing and managing, he was responsive, but never in the least pliable. Even with his closest friends, he took on the role of a mentor; he was a stickler, they could feel his eye on them, and sometimes, with those less intimate, his governessy side caused serious offence.¹

What was involved in this aspect of him was not bossiness but the determination to judge. A good way of visualizing Forster, I have found, is to imagine him being introduced to a dog or a cat. I never witnessed this, but can picture it. He would put himself on a level with the animal, approaching it tolerantly but non-committally. It *might* be a nice animal, but then again it might not, it was a mistake to have preconceptions on such matters; and at all events it didn't matter *much* what character an animal had – but it mattered a little. That would be his tone, I think; and he would shoot glances at the

¹ It did so with Lionel and Diana Trilling, though this was partly a case of Anglo-American misunderstanding. They brought their young son to see him at King's, sometime during the 1960s, and at tea the boy said he would have some more cake – to which Forster replied severely, as his mother might have done, 'You will have some when you are offered it.' The Trillings, who had been greatly attached to Forster, thought the snub intolerable and could never feel quite the same towards him again.

animal in the intervals of conversation, examining it from various angles till he had made up his mind about it. His mind was a vast breeding-ground for judgements and discriminations. He endlessly picked and chose and could distinguish one blade of grass from another. Similarly, no one ever made such *restrictive* remarks, giving and then drawing a limit to what was to be given. 'X—, with an intelligent face, fairly,' he might say; or 'I am devoted to Y—'s son, slightly.'

One could imagine, knowing him, that he had a 'secret'. It is a sentimental notion, but one that occurred to many of his acquaintances. It had to do with the fact that, to a rather special degree, he lived the imaginative life and, whether in company or in solitude, was attending to imaginative impressions. He did this consciously, feared to lose the power of doing so, and rebuked himself for slackness in it. It was, to him, the rule and aim of his existence and was entwined with his sense for what — for want of a better word — he called 'life'. He felt as if, on occasion, he could see through to 'life': could hear its wing-beat, could grasp it not just as a generality but as a palpable presence. The feeling communicated itself. I remember him, once, describing Masood's children, and their love for their companion Cotter Morison,¹ who was not quite right in the head. He spoke of it in a delighted tone, as if that was what life was made up of: the whole of life was present in it, and there was nothing beyond. I remember too, another even tinier incident. For some reason we were sharing a hotel bedroom, and as he undressed, the coins dropped out of his pocket, chinking as they fell, and he said, in a tone of mock-superstitious resignation: 'When they begin to sing, it's all over with them.' There was the same joyful note in his voice, and it was oddly ghostly and impressive, as if he truly had insight into the workings of Providence.

* * *

I started to keep a diary in 1952 and used to record meetings with him in it. Here follow a few extracts.

5.8.52. Tea with M.;² he described the plum cake as a *dire* one. Said what he liked about Aldeburgh, where he had been staying.

¹ Son of Masood's guardian Sir Theodore Morison.

² i.e. 'Morgan'.

was that it was so *athletic*, the air flowed by one, one didn't have to *fend* it from one. Spoke of Angus Wilson's *Hemlock and After* and said the opening chapter was good as construction in two ways. He had been reading ghost-stories, and what was bad about them was, they were so slow. About writing he said that he enjoyed it so much himself that he would be thinking about what he was writing at odd times and didn't listen to the clever things people said.

Later, in the Combination Room, he said, apropos of the papers (the *Daily Worker* and the *Tablet*), that he liked to have something of which you could say 'That's Communist,' 'That's Catholic,' and then you could think on from there. He didn't like it when they infiltrated.

28.8.52. Supper with M., Francis Bennett and Joseph S.,¹ at Joseph's expense. M. defined smoked salmon as 'the pork of the deeps'. He had been dining recently with Bob Buckingham at 'that nice, costly place,' the Red Lion at Grantchester. 'Everything very nice, and turns out more expensive than you thought. It is excellent. Bob's eyes shone.' He said, 'I have an Indian staying with me, who is going to get better.' I laughed a little too loudly at this, and he was faintly annoyed. 'Look at him! Laughing all over his face. It is perfectly ordinary English conversation.' He complained that no one in Cambridge was interested in India, nor did either Indians nor English people know about its history. 1.1.53. With M. in Francis Haskell's rooms. He described visiting his Aunt Rosalie and Aunt Nellie, now living near each other. Rosalie hissed, as he went on from her to Nellie. 'You won't get anything to eat *there!*' We discussed literary biography and whether a critic had any right to draw on biographical facts. M. said he often felt like wanting readers to know only what he chose to tell them about himself. This was probably just selfishness – it was because it made things *socially* more comfortable. The question to ask oneself was, how far removed is the author's state of mind, when writing, from what it is normally. If it is very different then what is true of his life will not be true of his writings. 'Is the state always the same for you?' I asked. 'You can only define it negatively,' he said. It is interfered with by the same things.' (His was always completely changed by people coming into the room.) He remarked: 'I find I sit down in the best chair: it is a little habit I have nowadays . . . Or perhaps I always had it. My New Year's resolution was to enjoy myself more and more in every way.' (Sadly) 'And now I am looking round for ways of *doing* it.'

4.1.53. M. to tea. He said 'Orgies are so important, and they are

¹ Yugoslav friend of E. K. Bennett.

things one knows *nothing* about.' We talked of the unhappiness of wealthy people who fear they are only loved for their money and are always wanting *real* love. He said it wasn't only wealthy people, it happened to others too (meaning himself) 'I suppose one answer is not to keep wanting people to love you . . . but it's difficult. It's more *practical* not to have devotions – to be independent. You do less damage, I suppose. Of course, it's customary to suspect devotion I read an absurd book on someone – who was it? – who was happily married, and the author thought that very suspicious. 'There's something psychological there! It wants looking into.'

6 5 53 M. just returned from France, where he had been touring with Bill Roerick and Tom Coley.¹ It was marvellous travelling with them, he said, something was always happening. Bill drew people out, went in the restaurant kitchen and got the menu changed, made great friends with the organist at Angoulême. 'I used to do it a bit,' said M. 'So I liked it. Once Tom got angry with Bill, and then we were all in trouble.'

24.6.53 M. for a drink. 'How lamentable I find other people's limitations,' he said. He had been visiting Siegfried Sassoon. 'Lives alone in a vast house, and can't see anyone in case it should happen to annoy the housekeeper.' Sassoon had talked all the time, and been so charming, overwhelmingly so, and such a bore too. (M. imitated him.)

8 9.53. M. at lunch in the Garden House Hotel. He talked about the High Table at King's. He had a technique for snubbing the Vice-Provost when he 'shouted' at dinner. M. 'happened' to know the private ailments of most of the elderly dons and would lean across the table and ask them quietly 'How was it at Addenbrooke's² today?' He called this 'flaunting the realities at him [the Vice-Provost]'. He said: 'We complain of the dullness at High Table, but then think "What have I contributed?" One isn't interested and sits there munching the nourishing food and saying nothing.'

20 11.53. M. to tea. He had been meeting Stephen Potter³ and found it dispiriting Potter oughtn't to spraddle in front of the fire, as he did, seeing that he had sold himself to Schweppes' advertisements. Potter kept improvising etymologies, at which he fancied himself; then he would go to the dictionary to confirm them and exclaim 'No, I'm wrong, ha, ha!' – he always was.

1.12 53. M. has been having an exchange of letters with Lord

¹ See pp. 246, 269.

² Hospital in Cambridge.

³ Stephen Potter (1900–69); literary critic and author of *Gamesmanship* (1947) and *One-Upmanship* (1952).

Samuel* over homosexuality. He tried to define Lord Samuel. 'Morally weighty, and actually a windbag. I think that's it, isn't it?'

12.7.54. Dinner with M. at the Reform Club. M.: 'It's so lovely when people are kind. Did you notice, she [the waitress] gave me a little touch on the shoulder.'

28.10.55. Went with M. to the Portuguese Art Exhibition [at Burlington House]. He stood for some minutes in front of the Goncalves 'Portrait of a Young Man', which we had seen in Lisbon,¹ and murmured 'Beautiful creature!' At dinner at the Reform we talked about old age. He said he felt things with more acute excitement than ever, but in disconnection. Recently he had been greatly excited by some carving on the choir-stalls in King's Chapel, but it had all gone by the time he left, and he couldn't remember what it had been about. Talked about slang and vogue-words. He said the expression 'I couldn't care less' was wrong, 'morally wrong.'

16.2.56. Had M. to supper. We talked of Portugal. He said Francis Haskell² had penetrated the inner Catholic circles of Portuguese society, and he wondered what it would be like . . . 'Inside that rose of mysticism and royalty and looking out towards one's own Protestantism.' He had been seeing his Aunt Nellie, who 'was not often to be seen, but very effective when she was.' When her sister Rosalie projected marriage with Bob Alford, she said she wouldn't marry Bob 'if every hair of his head were hung with diamonds'. He talked about Ramsey's suicide³ at King's; said he thought the villain of the piece had been Sheppard, who used to 'needle' Ramsey. As for poor Ramsey, he was 'a goose'.

26.3.56. Tea with M. at the Reform. He said what a worry stealing was. He often has the feeling of wanting to steal, and thinking how clever it would be of him.

By the end of 1956, he had completed *Marianne Thornton*.⁴ He had enjoyed writing it, and for a moment he considered attempting some further book of family memoirs, then he decided he must not 'maunder on' about his ancestors. He wondered what else he might write and, with simplicity, wrote to Leonard Woolf asking what he would suggest. Woolf advised him to write his autobiography, but

¹ We had gone to Portugal together for a holiday in the summer of 1953.

² F. J. H. Haskell (1928-); subsequently Professor of Art History in Oxford.

³ I. E. St Clair Ramsey, Dean of King's College, had committed suicide by throwing himself off the roof of the Chapel.

⁴ It was published in May 1956.

this was not advice he felt he could take. He thought he might be able to handle isolated incidents but he did not understand his own life sufficiently to describe it as a whole.

Then a quite different scheme occurred to him. Forty years before, he had written the first chapter of a novel, never to be continued, in which he depicted an 'Anglo-Indian' family – a widow, Mrs March, and her young children – returning on a boat from India. The children, with their mother's grudging permission, take up with a half-caste playmate, called 'Cocoanut'. At first, being white *Sahibs*, they order Coco about, which he rather enjoys. Then they let him lead them off on a mysterious game or errand of his own invention, and their mother catches sight of them on a distant deck, playing hatless in the mid-day sun. It is still the era of the solar *topi* and of the fear of sunstroke, and she rushes off to put a stop to their game, becoming involved in a curious little drama, full of confusion and cross-purposes. Suddenly, hot, tired and worried about the future, she becomes hysterical and vents her hysteria in rage against the half-caste: 'You're a silly little boy and I shall complain to the stewardess about you,' she breaks out at him angrily. 'You never will play any game properly and you stop the others. You're a silly idle useless unmanly little boy.'

Forster came upon the manuscript during his move to Cambridge and showed it to Ackerley, who was impressed by it and published it in the *Listener*.¹ Forster thought well of it himself, and, over the next few years, his mind continued to run on the characters – on that triangle of the mother, her eldest son Lionel, and the half-caste, 'Cocoanut'. What would have happened, he asked himself, if Lionel and Coco had met again in adult life and the faint attraction between them had revived and turned into a sexual affair? It was a different development from the one planned originally, but quite plausible. Other buried material came to his mind, like that bizarre incident during his first boat-trip to India, when an Indian accused his cabin-mate of threatening to throw him overboard and the two were later mysteriously reconciled. He found himself with the plot, not of a novel but of a long, tragic short story, and, during the summer of 1956, he decided to try writing it. It was a different sort of writing from his facetious short stories, and to begin with he doubted his

¹ 'Entrance to an Unwritten Novel'; *Listener*, 23 December 1948.

powers. He need not have doubted. To his excitement, he found he was producing something at his very best level and, in a way, of a new kind for him. This story, published posthumously as 'The Other Boat',¹ occupied him intermittently over the next year or two.

I will continue here with my diary.

2.4.57. M. is writing a long short story, a sequel to his fragment of forty years before about children on board a ship returning from India. The half-caste, ten years later, is determined to get the English officer, the 'marvellous creature', and arranges for them to share a cabin . . . 'It is easy to write tragedy, I find', M. said. 'No need to tidy everything up as you have to do with comedy.'

18.8.57. Went to see M. in Cambridge. He lent me Frank Sargeson's² novel *I Saw in my Dream*. He said it had a real plot as well as a mechanical one: 'a theme which reverberated.' 'Does it move on, as well as reverberate?' I asked. He replied with precision: 'The theme returns at intervals, on each occasion more forcibly.' He had just been interviewed by Angus Wilson, for *Encounter*.³ Wilson had liked everything in his room, except the petunias.

28.8.57. M. came with his new story. He said: 'Of course, I suppose I don't write so well as I used to, but I find writing more fascinating than ever.' 'Making this fit with that?' I asked. 'Making things work, yes,' he replied. He read me the story. Said T. E. Lawrence had told him that all one of M.'s unpublishable stories⁴ had done was to make him laugh: he was anxious for the new story not to run this danger.

29.8.57. M. last night, worried whether his story might not seem too 'clinical', especially when it came to the mother. He said you could only depict people *enjoying* making love if it was within a framework of tragedy. I said: 'Is that because otherwise it would make the reader envious?' He replied, severely: 'That was not the reason I had in mind. I meant that the reader would get bored.' He said people found his indecent stories monotonous: they ran to type. Whenever the same tall athletic figure came on the scene, eroticism started. This was limiting.

18.10.57. Dinner with M. at the Reform. He said Florence Barger was eighty now, and not always *compos mentis*. They had been at Covent Garden the night before, with Francis Bennett, and

¹ In 'The Life to Come' and *Other Stories* (1972).

² Frank Sargeson (1903-); New Zealand novelist. Forster who had been put on to Sargeson's work by William Plomer, wrote to him in 1949 in high praise of *I Saw in My Dream*. A correspondence ensued, and Forster wrote a brief Introduction to Sargeson's *Collected Stories* (1965, second impression).

³ See 'A Conversation with E. M. Forster', *Encounter*, November 1957.

⁴ 'The Life to Come'; see p. 121.

Florence had asked: 'Who is that old man who has attached himself to us?' 'But Florence, he's Francis Bennett.' 'If you say so, then I will accept it,' she said stiffly. 'She keeps her surface,' M. said; 'but I don't know if there is much beneath.' She looked at her *Times* every day, but he didn't think she read it.¹

6.3.58. M. to the flat tonight. He said Joe Ackerley had objected to the letter with which his new story begins. If the young man remembered all his mother had said and thought about Coco (the half-caste), he wouldn't have written this letter. 'Of course he wouldn't,' said M. 'But then one is up against the trouble of story-telling, and has to use devices. Not that Joseph Conrad didn't resort to far worse.' (He chuckled gleefully.)

7.3.58. Francis Bennett, according to M., is to have electrical shock-treatment, as a cure for depression; M. had written him what may have been a 'pushing' or patronizing letter.

23.3.58. M. came to collect his story, which I had been retyping. I said that I guessed that the added violence in the new climax was what he had originally intended: he said 'No, I've been unstable about it all the time.' Said that Francis, after his shock-treatment, was more like *that* – indicating jerky, nervous movements. Speaking of his book on his Thornton ancestors, he said: 'I try to make religion as dull as possible.'

15.6.58. M., at the Reform, told me that Francis Bennett had died.

5.7.58. M. said that on the night of Francis' death, a picture fell off the wall of his (M.'s) bedroom, and he had felt absolutely furiously angry.

21.10.58. M., at the Reform last night, told me he had been to Aldeburgh and described the home of his fisherman friend, Billy Burrell.² The front of the house was a beauty-parlour, and the back was used by fishermen in filthy oilskins: the smells sometimes met in the middle, and the effect was appalling. There were 'enormous intrusions of adorable fishermen'.

He had been reading *Dr Zhivago* and thought it became good after page 200. Pasternak was not good on people, so it was absurd to compare him with Tolstoy. He liked the two railway journeys very much, and the whole evocation of the Revolution: 'It makes you feel a revolution is *never* worth it.'

Said he thought the tragic theme of 'The Other Boat' – two people made to destroy each other – was more interesting than the theme of salvation, the rescuer from 'otherwhere', the generic Alec. That was a fake. People could help one another, yes; but they were not decisive for each other like that.

¹ She died in 1960.

² Burrell's wife kept a hair-dressing shop.

The writing of 'The Other Boat' had revived Forster's interest in his own career and reputation. At about this time he made one of his periodic siftings of his unpublished stories, and I typed some of them for him, also persuading him to have more copies of *Maurice* made. A friend of mine, O. W. Neighbour, had asked if he could read *Maurice*, and he raised a question about the *dénouement*. As it stood, Maurice, seeing Alec Scudder's boat depart for the Argentine without Scudder aboard, turns his face towards England in a brave blur of exalted hope. But how, asked Neighbour, was he actually going to find Alec? The point worried Forster, and during the next year or so he did some substantial revision to the end, adding a passage in which Maurice is brought safely to Alec's arms. He had no intention of publishing *Maurice* during his lifetime and now was not certain whether it ought to be published at all. He thought it might seem dated and, as he said, 'give such a dim report'. Also, one or two friends to whom he had recently shown it had responded rather coolly.

His literary executor, according to present arrangements, was to be Sebastian Sprott, and, failing him, Bob Buckingham. He meant whoever undertook the post to enjoy his posthumous royalties, and the idea now entered his mind of appointing Buckingham in Sprott's place, as an insurance for his future. It was not a firm plan, but it served him as a pretext for trying – as fifteen years before – to retrieve his letters from Joe Ackerley. 'Bob wouldn't be worried over my literary remains,' he wrote to Ackerley (21 August 1958). 'He might be worried by anything that made his work¹ awkward. I am for that reason collecting such letters written by myself as may be available, and storing them here, where they would be safe. I asked you some years ago, I remember, about my letters to you and you said they were stored with Herbert Read.' Ackerley suspected, probably correctly, that what Forster really wanted was to destroy the letters, or most of them, and he refused to surrender them, telling Forster they were back in his own possession and 'he would not care for them to be anywhere else.' At this, Forster dropped the subject. 'How good he is,' Ackerley noted:

¹ He would have felt safer, even in death, to have had his letters returned, he thinks he is not a good letter-writer and betrays himself and others. It may be that he is not a good letter-writer, but whether he is or not, his letters, and his friendship, have been

the major influence in my life from Cambridge onwards, if I gave up his letters I should give up one of the foundations of my life. I expect he knows that, he knows everything; he tried it on out of nervousness, and has easily let it go.

* * *

In January 1959 Forster was eighty, and to mark the occasion King's College organized a large birthday luncheon in the College Hall, attended by more than a hundred guests – friends, relatives, writers and dons. Bill Roerick, Tom Coley and Edith Oliver came over from America for it, and Charles Mauron and his second wife from France. Forster was happy and in high spirits. He heard himself referred to by the Provost, Noël Annan, as 'the greatest living Kingsman' and invited by him to 'ruminate and emanate' for long years to come, and in his reply he made mild pleasantries about old age, his own and the college's, concluding:

I had something else to say – can't remember. I would anyhow like to mention my Aunt Nelhe,¹ Miss Nellie Whichelo, who had to decline her invitation to this party because she is 96, and now sits at her own fireside drinking our health in Bristol Cream. I would also like to read this cable which I have just had from my friend Auden. It is entirely to my credit, but no matter. –

Dear Morgan, Wish I could be with you in more than spirit
Stop May you long continue what you already are Stop Old
famous loved yet not a sacred cow Stop Love and gratitude.
I certainly don't want to be a sacred anything, and may be
going a little further than Wystan here . . .*

Writing to William Plomer a year later (16 December 1959), he told Plomer: 'Another 80th Birthday lunch today. To Charles Tennyson. Oh a very small affair in comparison.'

* * *

My diary continues:

19.12.58. Spent night of Tuesday in M.'s Chiswick flat. We approached across the roof and over a little shaky iron bridge. He said he felt nervous of going to the flat alone nowadays. He had had an attack of deafness, could not listen to his new gramophone, and had told the doctor he needed 'psychological

¹ His aunt Rosahe had died in 1957.

re-adjustment'. 'They don't like gutting their language back at them,' he chuckled.

3 4.59. Dinner with M. He said his spirits were not high, and at last he had discovered what it was: it was something quite absurd: he was *affronted*, that was the word: Bob and May weren't near enough, Rob and Sylvia had moved further away, and Eric Fletcher had gone to the depths of Yorkshire. But the real trouble was the loss of Francis. one could go to him with complaints that *weren't* justified. Told me of Francis's affair with one of the waiters in his college: 'very grand and sly' it had been. Said of his own obituary on Francis in *The Casan*¹ that it was 'all right - too smiley' We discussed Canon Vidler², who proclaimed great freedom of thought and had joined the Rationalist Association. I said, 'But is it all genuine?' 'Well, there we are!' said M., lifting up his hands to convey how reasonable the doubt was, how little he committed himself, save just to indicate the faint possibility . . .

22 4 59. Lunched with M. last Friday. We talked about Christ. He said he didn't feel he wanted to know Christ. this had been an important factor in his loss of faith. If Christ were in the next room, would he want to go and meet him? Could one like someone who never laughed? Also, he lacked intellectual power: could one put up with the lack of that?

8.5.59. Dinner with M. at Reform. He had been to see his Aunt Nellie, who had collapsed and could not speak or write, but had asked for him. She and her home had been tidied up: her dirty old curtains pulled down, her face washed; 'it looked much smaller' - her toenails cut. M. banged the side of his chair to convey her indignation. He had arrived ready to 'condemn her to destruction', but his feeling had changed when he saw her. He supplied her with the swear-words she could not utter.

29.5.59. M. for lunch in restaurant, to collect *Maurice*,³ which I had been having retyped for him. 'Such a nice thing I've found,' he said; 'Francis's *Tales of Sarra*.⁴ I'm so pleased.' Then, recollecting himself. 'Actually I found the writing disappointing.'

9.10.59. M., at dinner at Reform, said he had been reading letters from his mother to his grandmother, and they were not very pleasant about him. His mother always accused him of helplessness.

¹ Caius College magazine. The obituary appeared in the number for the Michaelmas Term, 1958

² Alexander Roper Vidler (1899-); Canon of St George's Chapel, Windsor and prolific author of theological polemics.

³ I had encouraged him to get more copies made and had found him a typist in London.

⁴ A volume of stories by E. K. Bennett, privately printed in 1934 under his pseudonym of 'Francis Keppel'.

ness, but he had hoped she talked differently to others. When he broke his arm, falling on the steps of St Peter's, this had been taken as a signal example of his helplessness.

4.11.59. Saw M. off to Italy. In the Club last night Lord Beveridge¹ greeted him; they clasped hands and discussed the dispute over the India Office papers.² 'What a charmer,' he said to me afterwards; then a little later, recollecting himself, 'What an ill-informed distinguished old man.'

14.11.59. M., the other day, said that Kipling was one of the few people he deeply regretted not having known. He had lectured on him, admiringly, in India, and his audience, though polite, hadn't believed a word of it: they knew it could not be true of that monolithic imperialist.

12.12.59. M. back from Italy, looking young in a new grey suit. He had been taken to see the newly-discovered 'Cave of Tiberius' and there had been a violent row, in Italian, between the British Council men and a rough country fellow who would not let them in. At last he gave in, and the British Council men said 'He was only doing his duty, you know. We mustn't let ourselves get annoyed with these chaps,' and they offered him money. To M.'s glee, the man refused. M. talked about Thomas Hardy. What he most remembered was staying at T. E. Lawrence's cottage, and 'that bald head' emerging suddenly through the loft trapdoor. When they put electric pylons on Egdon Heath, Hardy said, 'We never thought Egdon was any use to anyone, and now you see, we were wrong.'

18.12.59. Dinner at Reform with M. and Joe Ackerley. Joe was writing a novel,³ and the publishers had said he must alter its locale, to avoid libel, so he had been investigating North London suburbs. He questioned shopkeepers, he said; and when, as sometimes happened, they said 'Why do you want to know?' he would answer, very irascibly, 'What's it got to do with you?' He had spotted an elderly porter who he thought might be useful as an informant. 'You've got grey hairs,' he had called out to him; 'You're the man I want.' - 'You use interesting approaches,' remarked M.

19.1.60. In Oxford yesterday, to see the dramatization of *A*

¹ William Henry Beveridge, 1st Baron (1879-1963); Director of the London School of Economics 1919-37 and author of the Beveridge Report of 1942 on *Social Insurance and Allied Services*. He and Forster were at preparatory school together.

² The governments of India and Pakistan were demanding the return of the India Office Library, having already made the same request, and been refused, four years before.

³ *We Think the World of You*; published, after various vicissitudes, by Bodley Head in 1960.

Passage to India.¹ After the performance M. came on the stage to make a speech, holding his arms drooping in front of him, in an odd posture. was struck by the commanding upper-middle-class voice emerging from the slightly awkward figure. He said: 'Though you might not think so, this is not the first time I have trodden the stage. On the previous occasion it was that of Covent Garden: then I only had to bow. Tonight's undertaking is more difficult . . . How good the actors were. And how pleased I was that there were so many of them. I am so used to seeing the sort of play which deals with one man and two women. They do not leave me with the feeling I have made a full theatrical meal. They are excellent in many ways, but they do not give me the impression of the multiplicity of life . . . As a member of the audience I have on occasion been thanked by the actors for being so good. It did not arouse in me any great emotion. All the same, it is a pretty thought, so I will give you my bow.' Talking today, he said it was absurd to say, as the *Times* review had done, that he was writing about the incompatibility of East and West. He was really concerned with the difficulty of living in the universe.

¹ By Santha Rama Rau. This was its première.

14 Last Years

By the 1950s there had begun for Forster a period of idolization. He had come to be honoured for personal goodness and sanctity, to an extent that perhaps few writers have known. In 1957 the American writer Dorothy Parker, in an interview in the *Paris Review*, remarked. 'Somerset Maugham once said to me, "We have a novelist here, E. M. Forster, though I don't expect he's familiar to you" Well I could have kicked him. Did he think I carried a papoose on my back? Why I'd go on my hands and knees to get to Forster.'¹ There were others who spoke of him almost as extravagantly. And moreover, in print at least, he had remarkably few detractors.² His friends were not all so reverent. Lord Kennet reported an exchange between Forster and Percy Lubbock in 1955.

Lubbock: It's too funny your becoming the holy man of letters.

You're really a spiteful old thing. Why haven't people found you out, and run you down?

Forster (cheerfully): They're beginning.

Nevertheless, even with many of his friends, 'holiness' entered into their conception of him.

He was meanwhile, till the end of the 1950s, an active and influen-

¹ He drafted a grateful reply to her, which he never despatched.

² His most formidable detractor was Graham Greene. Greene caricatured him in *The Third Man* as the old-maidish writer Benjamin Dexter, who 'took a passionate interest in embroidery' and calmed 'a not very tumultuous mind with tatting'. He also attacked him in *Why Do I Write?* as an irresponsible liberal, a typical member of the PEN Club, always signing appeals in *The Times*. 'So long as he [i.e. such a writer] had eased his conscience publicly in print, and in good company, he was not concerned with the consequences of his letter.'

tial writer. During his visit to Italy in 1959 he had heard much talk of the novel *Il Gattopardo* (*The Leopard*) and of its author, the Prince of Lampedusa, who had died recently. He bought it and read it in Italian and found it wonderful, a life-affirming book after his own heart. The book, so he said later, had enlarged his own life, for all that that life was now in its eighties: 'Reading and rereading it has made me realize how many ways there are of being alive, how many doors there are, close to one, which someone else's touch may open.'¹ When the English translation, by Archibald Colquhoun, came out in the following year, he reviewed it at some length in the *Spectator* (13 May 1960). It was an eloquent and feeling review, responsive especially to the novel's enlightened attitude to death:

What a tribute to the urbanity of death! The whole [last] chapter scintillates with power and with a tenderness that is untroubled by pity. There is no summing up, nor moral balancing, though before his consciousness weakens the dying man thinks what has happened to him and employs himself in separating the good moments from the bad.

This was to be the last major review that Forster would write.² He now found it difficult to concentrate. He complained that his life was all in pieces and scraps, and the tone of these complaints, which were not new with him, was changing from self-rebuke to resignation. 'Going to Bits' was the heading of an entry in his Commonplace Book for 31 January 1961:

This phrase describes me today and is indeed the one I have been looking for: not tragic, not mortal disintegration, only a central weakness which prevents me from concentrating or settling down. I have so wanted to write and write ahead. The phrase 'obligatory creation' has haunted me. I have so wanted to get out of my morning bath promptly: I have decided to do so beforehand, and have then laid in it as usual and watched myself not getting out. It looks as if there is a physical as well as a moral break in the orders I send out. I have plenty of interesting thoughts but keep losing them like the post cards I have written, or like my cap . . .

¹ Introduction to Lampedusa's *Two Stories and a Memory*, trans. A. Colquhoun (1962).

² His very last review was of Leonard Woolf's *Growing* in the *Observer*, 5 November 1961.

He knew, without too much sadness, that his career was more or less at an end, and the knowledge revived in him thoughts of a biography of himself. Sometimes it seemed to him, his life was too uneventful to be written, but at other times he felt eager for it. At all events, he guessed that someone would attempt a *Life*, so he decided to make preparations. Sprott suggested that he should invite William Plomer to write something on him – either a full-dress *Life* or a shorter sketch, and he put the idea to Plomer, who agreed. This was in August 1960, and over the next year or so, in a desultory way, Plomer questioned Forster about his life and career and Forster wrote notes for him.

* * *

In November 1960 Forster appeared as a witness in the *Lady Chatterley* trial at the Old Bailey. A new Obscene Publications Act had been passed the previous year, and under this a book, though admitted to be obscene, might now be defended on the grounds that its publication was for the public good, as being 'in the interests of science, literature, art, or learning' – the Courts being required to hear expert witnesses on this issue. The prosecution of Penguin Books for publishing the unexpurgated *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was the first brought under the new Act and was thus a test case.¹ Forster, one of thirty-five expert witnesses, spoke on the third day of the trial – coming after the decisive cross-examination of Richard Hoggart, in which Hoggart had maintained Lawrence's book to be 'highly virtuous and if anything, puritanical'. Jeremy Hutchinson, the defence counsel, asked Forster where he would place Lawrence in literature.

F. In all the literature of the day, do you mean; in all contemporary literature?

H. Yes.

F. I should place him enormously high. When one comes to the upper ten novels, then one has to begin to think a little of the order, but compared with all the novels which come out, the novels he wrote dominate terrifically.

¹ The Director of Public Prosecutions, Sir Theobald Mathew, had been shown Penguins' advertisement for their forthcoming edition of *Lady Chatterley*, and ordered the police to buy a copy, upon publication, in the Charing Cross Road. However, Penguin's solicitor forestalled this by inviting the police to call round at the Penguin offices and collect as many copies as they wanted – thus removing the need to implicate a bookseller.

E. M. Forster: A Life

H. When he died I think you described him as the greatest imaginative novelist of your generation?

F. Yes, I would still hold to it.

H. You have read *Lady Chatterley's Lover*?

F. Yes.

H. Judging it in the same way, what would you say as to its literary merit?

F. Judging it in the same way, I should say that it had very high literary merit. It is, perhaps I might add, not the novel of Lawrence which I most admire. That would be *Sons and Lovers*, I think.

H. Lawrence has been described as forming part of the great Puritan stream of writers in this country. Have you any comment to make on that?

F. I think the description is a correct one, though I understand that at first people would think it paradoxical. But when I was thinking over this matter beforehand, I considered his relationship to Bunyan. They both were preachers. They both believed intensely in what they preached. I would say, if I may speak of antecedents, of great names, Bunyan on the one hand and Blake on the other; Lawrence too had this passionate opinion of the world and what it ought to be, but is not.

Forster, remembering the *Well of Loneliness* case, was elated when the trial went in favour of Penguin Books. He told Ackerley (4 December 1960) that it felt odd to be on the winning side. He intended, he said, to go to Penguins' victory party, though it ought to have been a dinner party 'considering all we have put in their pockets . . .'¹ 'By the way, did D. H. Lawrence ever do anything for anybody? Now that we have been sweating ourselves to help him, the idea occurs.'

* * *

Despite the fact that Plomer was writing his *Life*, the close-knit alliance between himself, Plomer, Sprott and Ackerley was falling a little apart. For one thing, Plomer had in 1953 left London for Sussex, settling in a seaside bungalow at Rustington with a friend of his, Charles Erdman. In the normal way Forster and Plomer did not now meet very often. Moreover, though Plomer was to write his *Life*, he had grown by this time less in sympathy with some of Forster's attitudes. He had himself become religious, which created a

¹ The sales of the Penguin *Lady Chatterley* proved, as expected, enormous.

barrier; also, he disliked Forster's indecent stories, considering them unworthy of him, and Forster guessed this.

Sprott and Forster, likewise, saw each other much less often. The days had gone by when, every few weeks, Sprott would be borrowing Forster's London flat. And, dearly as Forster loved Sprott, he found visits to Nottingham a trial. the house was so cold, and so grimy, and Sprott would talk so much. Also more serious, he would drink so much. Sprott, a professor since 1948, had made more of his career than Forster had expected. His book *Human Groups* (1958) was quite widely known, and his lectures had a large following. (They were a great technical display. He would stop on time to the very second – vanishing instantly, still talking at colossal speed – and would resume next week as if completing the same sentence.) Nevertheless, the drinking worried Forster. It did so on Sprott's account; and, since Sprott was his literary executor, on his own also.

He still regularly saw Joe Ackerley, but here too there was a change. Ackerley claimed that his years with his dog Queenie, who died in 1961, had been the happiest of his life. But, happy or not, they had made him a misanthrope, committed to the cause of animals as against the human race. ('Everyone in the long run must decide which side he is on,' he said to Harry Daley.) He had espoused the cause of animals with fanaticism, constantly writing to the press on their behalf.¹ If he heard that friends were leaving their cat alone at the weekend, he might quite likely go and keep it company. To Forster, who had once called the saying *Plus que je vois les hommes plus j'aime les chiens* 'one of the most hopeless and ignoble maxims ever uttered',² it seemed a tragic madness, and it separated him a little from Ackerley.

Ackerley, for his part, was growing critical of Forster. He would pick holes in Forster's books, saying how much he 'got away with' in *Howards End* and that he enjoyed his own *Hindoo Holiday* more than *The Hill of Devi*. Forster's fussy ways began to irritate him, and he would grumble at Forster's referring to him as 'Ackerly' in *Marianne*

¹ Some swans on Barnes common once hissed at Queenie, and Ackerley at once wrote to the mayor. His letter, according to William Plomer, ran. 'I have something very disgraceful to report. You have some quite undisciplined swans on the Common: they have threatened my Alsatian in a most serious manner. I can't answer for the state of her nerves if it occurs again . . . etc.'

² 'Notes on the Way'; *Time and Tide*, 23 June 1934. His article asked 'Can we take on the animals?'

Thornton. ('After all these years, he couldn't even spell my name!') It was an irritation not so much against Forster as against his own long self-imposed prostration before him, which he felt had hindered his own writing. By now, he was active again as a writer, and in 1956 had published *My Dog Tulip*, an account of his life with Queenie. It had had quite a success, and Forster himself had praised it in public, though privately admitting to Ackerley that parts of it had shocked him. Despite his success, Ackerley was in low spirits. In 1959 he had been retired from the *Listener*, and it had left him feeling at a loose end. He was hard up, was drinking too much for his pocket, and – with Queenie and his Aunt Bunnie in his flat, and his sister Nancy in lodgings nearby – he saw himself, in gloomier moments, as marooned among jealous and possessive females.¹ In the winter of 1960–61 he had gone to Japan, at Forster's expense, and for a moment he had been cheered, then had suffered an emotional 'disaster', of the kind that his life was littered with, and had returned no more cheerful than he set out.

* * *

In April 1961, a few months after Ackerley's return from Japan, Forster visited him in his flat at Putney and had a fall on the threshold, breaking his wrist and suffering shock. ('No one else had ever done it,' said Ackerley, in a grumbling tone, 'but Morgan chose to.') Bob Buckingham was summoned and brought Forster back to Cambridge, and he spent a night or two in hospital. All went well with his wrist, but a few days later he felt ill and had to return to hospital and was told he might have suffered damage to his heart or lungs.

The news left him philosophical. He wrote to Bob Buckingham, 'We must not worry about my failing powers . . . To me decay is so natural in a universe that admits growth, and it puzzles me that so great a man as Hardy should have wasted so many of his poems in saying "I am not what I was. Boo!"' None the less, he took it as a warning of approaching death, and his thoughts turned once more to posthumous arrangements. Joe Ackerley had recently said to him that Sprott and himself were 'a couple of alcoholics'. It had been a joke, but it had worried Forster, and in his present frail condition he wrote Sprott a needling and rather unkind letter (20 April 1961):

¹ See his sketch 'A Summer Evening', *London Magazine*, October 1969, describing an evening in 1958.

Joe – or has he got it wrong again? – tells me that you and he are Y addicts¹ – two classes above or below the Master of the Rolls, he naturally forgets which. Long may you both continue to swill and I to sip in your wakes. What about addicts as exors [*sic*]? It seems to me that they are perfectly suitable in most matters – acceptance of property, payment of legacies, winding up of estates etc. – but that of a literary exorship might be different. *You* are perfectly and equally suitable for that too in the immediate future, but no one wants you to act immediately and if you had to do it in 5 or 8 years' time, when you might be a Y + or –, might you not find it remote, boring, vexatious?

Do you think there is anything in the following device? To leave you as general exor and residuary legatee, if you will be so good and sweet as to remain, *but* to make a literary exor out of Bob? I am sure that he would do the job, though it is outside his own line, and that a 'certain element' in unpublished Mss. would not disconcert him.

The letter, naturally, caused a flurry. 'What have you been saying to Morgan?' asked Sprott; and Ackerley, in reply, complained bitterly of Forster's interferingness. Nothing ensued about the executorship; and Forster had earned so much devotion from the friends that they did not quarrel with him; indeed Sprott, an unresentful person, soon forgot it. With Ackerley, however, it rankled.

Meanwhile, Forster had collapsed once more and had been rushed into hospital. He was suffering from a blood-deficiency, and for a day or two, before this was diagnosed, his life was in danger. Later, in his *Commonplace Book*, he recorded the experience, which had confirmed him in his belief that death was 'nothing if you can approach it as such'.

No pain, no fear, no thought of eternity, infinity, fate, love, sin, humanity or any of the usuals. Only weakness, and too weak to be aware of any thing but weakness. 'I shan't be here if I get weaker than this' was the nearest approach to a thought. I knew that Bob and May were to my right and left – they had been summoned by the Police and arrived about 4.0 – and was not surprised and liked touching them: Bob's little finger pressed mine and pursued it when it shifted. This I shall never forget.

A story about him went the round at this time. It was that he had been put in the public ward of the hospital, next to a jaundice-patient very yellow in the face, and when it was suggested that he move to

¹ I have not traced the source of this phrase.

a private ward, he said anxiously that he did not like to – the person in the next bed might think it racial prejudice.

* * *

He had a strong constitution, and after two months or so he had returned to more or less normal health. He was able to go about visiting, and to travel, and during the next year or two he went on several foreign holidays – to Italy with a young Cambridge friend Tim Leggatt in 1962, to St Rémy to stay with Charles Mauron (also to Paris and Switzerland) in 1963, and again to St Rémy, with the Buckinghams, in 1964. At Christmas, as for some years now, he would go and stay at Rockingham Castle with his friend Lady Faith Culme-Seymour (a daughter of Lord Sandwich) and her husband, being amused at the mixture of grandeur and servantless domesticity. (He was by now less prejudiced against the aristocracy and had other aristocratic friends, among them Lord Harewood.)

There were the usual losses through age. His sight was weakening; he had gone deaf in one ear, which disturbed his enjoyment of music, and he could no longer play the piano. The process of decay interested him, and he analysed it frequently in his *Commonplace Book* and diary, telling himself in future entries to try avoiding the pronoun 'I'. There were, he noted (22 January 1962), some positive gains from age:

What pleases and is new: visual interests, today the sunlight swayed over the vase of flowers and made them dance, and appear to open and shut; in the flat the relation, as I lay in bed, between the spire of St Utrillo's¹ and the slab of the lighted gas-fire. Connected with my failing, faded, and therefore yearning eyesight?

More and more he was conscious of living in scraps and from moment to moment. 'In a short walk,' he noted in his *Commonplace Book* in 1962, 'visual delicacies and splendours rush at me as frequently as, perhaps more frequently than, ever, but the power to retain them has gone.'

With age, his passion for giving grew. He was continually finding occasions to help friends and protégés, and made several large public benefactions. He gave several thousand pounds to the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge towards the buying of a Greek sculpture, and

¹ William Plomer's nickname for the church on Turnham Green, visible from his flat windows.

when the London Library, in need of funds, asked for gifts from members and well-wishers, to be auctioned at Christie's, he donated the manuscript of *A Passage to India*. (It fetched £6,500, then a record price for a manuscript by a living author.) He was rich, anyhow by his own modest standards, and, true to his principles, he was troubled by the money and did not wish for more. He said as much to a fellow-don, Maurice Hill,¹ in the Combination Room at King's, in the April of 1964 – with odd consequences. Hill had asked him how much he earned by his writings, Forster had told him, and let slip that he had £20,000 or so lying idle in his current account. This for some reason enraged Hill, who called Forster an 'ass' and strode out of the room. Forster, equally incensed, wrote Hill a letter the same evening, saying: 'Don't stride from the room with the air of having hurled a devastating bolt when you have done nothing of the sort. Your trouble is that you have not read my books properly.' Hill apologized. But a week later, Forster astonished the Buckinghams by making them a present of £10,000.

He counted himself happy: loved, cared for, sought after, and still, after so many deaths,² surrounded by friends. From time to time he was plagued with sexual longings, but not too painfully. 'I am rather prone to senile lechery just now – want to touch the right person in the right place, in order to shake off bodily loneliness,' he wrote to Joe Ackerley (16 October 1961). 'I think it would and suppose it could easily be fixed in Japan. I shan't go there, and the loneliness is not total or tragic. Licentious scribblings help and though they are probably fatuous I am never ashamed of them.'

There was one acute grief in his life, the tragedy of his godchild, Rob Buckingham. Rob had grown a young man of much character: gentle, intelligent, and strong-minded. He had resisted all attempts to uproot him from the working class and had become a plumber. He had got married in 1953 and possessed two sons, and he and his wife Sylvia had become greatly attached to Forster, and he to them. In 1961, however, Rob had fallen mysteriously ill; and after many false diagnoses, he had been discovered to be dying from Hodgkin's disease. There had followed a year of misery – recoveries, relapses,

¹ Maurice Hill (1909–66), a distinguished geophysicist. He was at this time already suffering from a fatal disease.

² John Simpson died in 1955, Frank Vicary in 1956, H. O. Meredith in 1964.

and a last despairing visit to a Weymouth sanatorium – and in September 1962 he had died. Forster grieved bitterly. Two days after Rob's death, as he was hunting for some papers in his bureau, he felt a scratching at his trouser-leg and, turning, perceived a kitten, it tempted him for a moment to superstition. 'What a time some mourners would have had with her as a Kar,¹ or a messenger from the corpse,' he reflected. He wondered if Rob's death would disturb the 'symbiosis' of his and the Buckinghams' life. He longed to talk with May about Rob, when she could bear it. 'I like what she says. I *think* life may run smooth again, but we all have shattered nerves.'

* * *

In November 1964 Forster had a mild stroke in Cambridge, being left for a week or two afterwards with slurred speech and difficulty in writing. Another stroke followed in April of the next year, while he was with the Buckinghams in Coventry, and its effects lasted longer. For a month or two, Bob Buckingham had to write his letters for him, and his speech was slightly but permanently impaired – he would from now on momentarily grope for words or have difficulty in articulation. His memory also worsened, and he began to make muddles – forgetting faces and appointments.

It was clear to him that his remaining days must be a preparation for death. He had once said that he would like to die 'in an odour of sanctity', and the wish made itself felt. He was beginning, quietly, to strip himself of possessions, pressing friends to accept books and pieces of his furniture. A habit was growing on him, also, of expressing gratitude – of exclaiming, during a meal perhaps, how lucky he was, how many things he had to be thankful for. Gratitude interested him as a sentiment. He wrote in his diary for 16 May 1964: 'How odd is this feeling of gratitude when one isn't being grateful to anyone. Pleasanter than if there was someone e.g. God – which would entail a feeling of obligation.' In June 1964 he went to stay with William Golding in Wiltshire, and they visited Figsbury Rings, the inspiration of *The Longest Journey*. It was his first visit for sixty years. As they walked the downs, they discussed the near-extinction of Chalk Blue butterflies, through pesticides, when one flew between them and settled on a tall grass stem, in the very entrance to the Rings.

¹ A 'fetch' or wraith. In the antechamber of Tutenkhamun's tomb there are inscribed the words 'May thy Ka live!'

Forster, in a pantomime of the world's ruthlessness, danced after it, brandishing his walking-stick, with a cry of 'Kill! Kill!'¹ His private thoughts were all of gratitude:

I exclaimed several times that the area was marvellous, and large – larger than I recalled. I was filled with thankfulness and security and glad that I had given myself so much back. The butterfly was a moving glint, and I shall lie in Stephen's arms instead of his child.²

As time went on the decay of his memory became a problem. He still kept up his business correspondence in his own hands, not being willing to use an agent, but he was not really coping with it, or even keeping up with his private correspondence. Joe Ackerley would come up to Cambridge to help him and to write letters for him, but there were bothers and confusions, mislaid cheques and broken appointments. I went up to see him in King's on 12 October 1965, and his first words were, 'I get worse, you know' – meaning he was losing his memory. There followed a tiny comedy, recorded in my diary:

I said I was reading Tolstoy, and asked him if he agreed that one *forgot* Tolstoy, more so than with other novelists, and if so why? He smirked fleetingly at the tactless allusion to forgetting, saying that he agreed to the fact but 'disowned' drawing any conclusion. He told me an American friend of his had been reading 'The Death of Ivan Ilych' to him and it had made him (the American) so ill, that they had to leave the erf till another day. 'So – obviously – he hadn't read it before?' I said. 'He had,' said M., 'and, *relevantly*, he had forgotten it.'

It vexed Forster that his forgetfulness was annoying people, otherwise it did not depress him unduly. A different trouble had arisen for him – to him more serious. At the time of his first stroke, when it seemed he might be dying, he had spoken very freely to Bob Buckingham about his own love for him, and this had had a strange consequence. Bob, on his return to Coventry, had spoken of it to May, in tones of consternation. He told her he had never known of these feelings of Forster's. Indeed he said, somewhat implausibly, that he had never even known that Forster was homosexual. It had shocked and upset him, he told her, and he would never be able to feel quite

¹ Related to the author by William Golding.

² At the close of *The Longest Journey* Stephen Wonham sleeps out on the hillside with his baby daughter in his arms.

the same towards Forster. Soon, in fact, there began to be trouble between them. Bob would be impatient with Forster. He would shout him down in conversation, would complain to May and to other friends about Forster's muddling and obstinacy, and would fret at his long stays in Coventry. Forster was upset by the change, though he did not fathom the cause, and so was May on his behalf. It was, she knew, partly that Bob hated old age; he had been as impatient with his own mother when she was 'failing'. Also, she guessed, he was jealous over herself. She made a great fuss of Forster when he stayed in Coventry, and did so more than ever as he grew frailer, and Bob would feel neglected – sometimes developing ailments himself out of unconscious rivalry. And it was true, as even May found, that Forster was a demanding guest. He was used to maids and would leave his clothes where they fell in his bedroom, expecting others to tidy them. He disliked the television and would shut his eyes before it, or put his fingers in his ears. He needed conversation, and would think it odd that May should busy herself with housework instead of talking to him.

As for the 'revelation' about Forster, May did not know what to think. She had known of course that he was homosexual, but had never thought of the friendship with Bob as a sexual one. It only now dawned on her why Joe Ackerley, and others, kept insisting how 'marvellous' she had been about the friendship. But whatever the facts, they did not perturb her. A curious reversal of earlier rôles took place among the three of them, and it was now May who saved the relationship. She fought passionately in Forster's cause. She told Bob that he was their dear friend and benefactor and that so long as he lived, their house should be his home.

As for Forster, though puzzled, he took the change in Bob calmly, being helped in this by his attitude towards death. For him, it was just one more episode in their friendship, no more significant because it happened near the end. He watched Bob's moods nervously but loved him no less fondly, and there were long periods when Bob was his old affectionate self.

* * *

There were other strains and fallings-away among Forster's friendships. The tie between him and Ackerley remained strong. Ackerley's letters to friends were still full of Forster, reporting his jokes and his state of health and bemoaning his muddles. Nevertheless

there was a change. Ackerley sometimes felt that he had 'fallen from grace' in Forster's eyes, and he, for his part, would take issue with Forster over animals. He wrote to Plomer (6 November 1966):

There is a rowan tree in Bob's front garden in Coventry, and when I was last there I was watching, with interest and pleasure, the blackbirds and thrushes eating the berries. They would pluck one, hold it visibly for a moment, like a coral bead, in their beaks, then swallow it at a gulp. I mentioned this to Morgan. He said: 'Yes, aren't they a nuisance.' Astonished I said 'Why a nuisance?' He said 'I like to see the berries on the tree.' I still think that selfishness could hardly go further, the birds are in trouble enough for eating *our* food without being reproached for eating their own.

There was, too, a soreness over money in Ackerley's mind. On his aunt's death, his sister Nancy had come to live with him, and he was worried about Nancy's future as well as his own. He thought Forster ought to give him some permanent provision, as he had done with the Buckinghams, whereas Forster only gave him occasional bounties. Eventually, in November 1966, on a friend's advice, he wrote to Forster, frankly asking him to settle some money on him, and Forster sent him a cheque for £1,000, saying it was 'both easy and pleasant' for him to do so. 'It was generous, but not what Ackerley had hoped. He was piqued, not so much because of the money as because he guessed Forster's motive in not giving more, which was that he would drink it away. In April of the next year, under the influence of this disappointment, he sold Forster's letters to Texas University, for £6,000. It was arranged that the letters should be under seal till Forster's death and for some years afterwards, but it left him uneasy, and he prayed Forster might never find out.¹

At about the same time, Forster began to wonder about Plomer's projected book on himself, which seemed not to have made much progress. (It may have been Ackerley who brought the subject up, for Ackerley had rather turned against Plomer, considering him too 'slippery' and establishment-minded.) Ackerley drafted a letter to Plomer, for Forster to sign, designed to make Plomer 'put his cards on the table'. And meanwhile a letter from Forster, in Ackerley's handwriting, was also sent to me, asking me if I would like to write a book about him, and I agreed – not knowing of the arrangement

¹ It is not certain whether he ever did.

with Plomer. Ackerley had thought his letter to Plomer 'admirable' and one that could give no offence, but Plomer was upset and angry. He did not remonstrate with Forster himself, but told Ackerley that why he had not discussed his book with Forster was that he did not want to remind him of his death. In a second letter (8 May 1967) he said aggrievedly 'When I first knew Morgan, I was struck by his fondness for the word 'muddle'. In his old age he seems to have made one. As he does not seem to know what he is doing, I don't suppose anybody else does!' Against me he bore no grudge. Indeed before long we became friends and he gave me the few notes he had made on Forster.

I began, on my visits to Forster, to ply him with questions about himself and his life. He answered my questions tersely but indulgently, with – as always – odd, very charming *nuances* of phrasing. His memory for past events was still fairly good, sometimes, though not often, he would get confused over facts, and occasionally he became deliberately vague. At my request, he lent me his locked diary, grew anxious and asked for it back, and then gave it to me again. He told me he did not intend to read what I wrote about him – an announcement that took me aback for a moment, till I saw how considerate it was. Later on, King's elected me to a research fellowship, and from then on we were often in each other's company.

* * *

On 4 June 1967, Joe Ackerley died in his sleep. Forster was with the Buckinghams at Aldeburgh when the news arrived. They did not tell him till last thing at night, knowing he had a way of sleeping bad news off, and he seemed not to take it in, but next day at breakfast he said quietly that it was a sad day for all Joe's friends. When Ackerley's ruthless and remarkable autobiography, *My Father and Myself*, came out the next year, he got May Buckingham to read it to him but was depressed by it. He wrote in confusion to Duncan Grant, thanking him for his letter – though in fact Grant had not written to him – and saying how much he agreed with Grant about Joe's book, 'though no one else will':

It seems so ill-tempered, and such a reproach to all his friends. Did any of his friends (except of course Queenie) love him or appear to love him?¹ I wish I could give him a good smack!

¹ Evidently meaning to say that no one would have guessed from the book how much love he had received from his friends.

Ackerley, a few months before his death, had written an obituary article on Forster,¹ depositing it with the *Observer* for future use. It was a brilliantly written and moving portrait, expressing unstinted admiration and love for Forster. Its climatic sentence ran:

I would say that in so far as it is possible for any human being to be both wise and worldly wise, to be selfless in any material sense, to have no envy, jealousy, vanity, conceit, to contain no malice, no hatred (though he had anger), to be always reliable, considerate, generous, never cheap, Morgan came as close to that as can be got.

* * *

In the New Year's honours list of 1 January 1969 Forster was awarded an O.M., and the College organized a luncheon during the same month in honour of this and of his ninetieth birthday. It was quite a small and private affair as compared with the birthday party of ten years before. At his own choice, he sat between two cousins – Philip Whichelo, an artist and stage-designer, from his mother's family, and Meyrick Owen, a schoolmaster, from his father's.² He looked intensely old – sitting rather silent and slumped, though in command of proceedings. The College servants had made him a birthday cake, in the form of a book bearing the titles of his novels, and he sawed away at a corner of it, murmuring 'I'd better do this now, in case I do something more important later.' The Vice-Provost, Edward Shire, then presented him with a copy, bound in green leather, of the symposium *Aspects of E. M. Forster*, just published by Edward Arnold & Co. under the editorship of Oliver Stallybrass. He looked at it suspiciously and asked who he was to thank for it. 'I suppose, Messrs. Arnold and Stallybrass,' said Shire. Forster beamed vaguely, and Tom Coley called across the table, 'You might think of thanking yourself,' which pleased him. Opening the book, he encountered his own photo. 'Well, that's all right,' he said; and then, feeling attention on him still, 'How intelligent I look!'

He was now burdened with age. He was deaf, was not able to read much or to write more than the briefest of letters. In conversation with friends, and on his own terms, he was still much as he had always been, but with strangers he could be jaw-dropped and blank.

¹ The article appeared in the *Observer* in abbreviated form on 14 June 1970, and the full version was published later the same year in pamphlet form by Ian McKelvie.

² See the family trees on pp. xviii–xix.

Even in the case of friends, he would sometimes muddle their identities, becoming expert at concealing the fact. In March 1970 Christopher Isherwood came to see him at King's, and they met by chance on the staircase. Forster exclaimed: 'That's most extraordinary!', apparently not recognizing Isherwood, or having thought him dead. 'What's wrong Morgan, have I changed so much?' asked Isherwood. 'Thicker!' replied Forster, now quite in command of the situation; and when they reached his rooms he examined Isherwood, all round for signs of thickness. 'Don't look at the back of my neck that's my weakest point,' said Isherwood; so Forster made a particular study of it ¹

* * *

My rooms in King's were on the same staircase as Forster's, and at about 6 p.m. on Friday 22 May 1970 I heard a loud shout, and then another I realized it was Forster and went down, finding him lying on the floor just inside his door – he had fallen in his bedroom and had crawled from there. I went to find a porter; together we lifted him onto the sofa, and I summoned a doctor. The doctor, who was a friend of Forster's, was non-committal, nevertheless, Forster guessed at once that he had had a final stroke. I was expecting guests at 9 p.m. and by that time he was outwardly perfectly calm. He insisted on my bringing my guests down to his room, and for a few minutes he was quite gay, he said of one of his legs, which was paralysed, that it was all right but 'did rather dominate'.

By next day he was helpless, having lost the use of both his legs, and was no longer in any doubt that he was dying. What he wanted above all was to be taken to Coventry, but the Buckinghams were unable to come for a few days. It was a blow, and for a moment he was despairing, murmuring 'I wonder what will become of me'; then quite quickly he rallied. Some friends and I took charge of him, with the College matron's aid, getting him up and dressing him and putting him to bed. He was stoical and gay. Only at night was he miserable, groaning 'Oh dear, oh dear.' His formula for this was that he was 'cross'. One morning he told me he had groaned so much in the night that a neighbour had come in to him; 'and I only did it because I was cross.' Once an eccentric King's don, John Saltmarsh, came to see him in his bedroom, discoursing lengthily upon steam-ploughs and

¹ Related by the painter Mark Lancaster, who was present.

the mission field. Forster looked dead to the world, but as his visitor left murmured, 'He's really very nice, that old bore.'

On Wednesday 2 June Bob Buckingham came and took Forster back to Coventry, and once there, and having been put to bed, he became perfectly serene. On the following Saturday Eric Fletcher and his wife arrived. The whole party gathered at Forster's bedside before dinner and again after dinner, and, breaking a lifelong habit of abstemiousness, he drank a great deal, talking very charmingly and with great cheerfulness. After this, day by day, he steadily grew weaker. On 6 June, for most of the morning, he held May Buckingham's hand in silence, opening his eyes when she tried to take it away – till at last he fell asleep or unconscious. He died, without recovering consciousness, early the next morning.

He had left instructions that he was to be 'disposed of' wherever he happened to be at the time of his death, and without religious observances. The responsibility fell on the Buckinghams, and they decided that he should be cremated. Bob Buckingham felt diffident about giving a funeral address. He felt, none the less, that there ought to be some ceremony, so he arranged for music to be played on a record-player in the chapel, remembering *Howards End*, he chose the *scherzo* from Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. Despite this, it was for the mourners a slightly depressing experience, as all such non-religious rituals are; but as we filed back towards the cars there was a diversion. The undertakers' men were peering inside the bonnet of the leading Rolls, evidently unable to make it start. The chief undertaker approached, pressing his black gloves to his forehead in a theatrical gesture, protesting that never, never in twenty years, had such an unfortunate thing . . . And at this Sprott, who had been gloomy, brightened greatly, remarking that Forster's spirit was clearly at work.

Notes

Page 62 *He had a more personal encounter with Shaw a few years later, in 1926, which he found disappointing. 'You can imagine how excited I was to be invited [to lunch],' he wrote to G. H. Ludolf (11 July 1926), 'and how disappointed to find an old old gentleman and a cushiony wife. Shaw was pleasant and amusing, but I felt all the time that he'd forgotten what people are like (can it be that he never knew and that this accounts for something that's lacking in his plays?). She [Mrs Shaw] wanted to talk' mysticism, and denounced "atheists" with the accents of a rural dean. I came away with the hump for, surely, two of the best things in life are human beings and beauty, and both seemed to get ruled out.'

Page 119 *For instance, Masood quoted the couplet from the Urdu of Ghalib (1797-1869), poet laureate to the last of the Moguls:

Not all, alas! only a few, have come back to us in the
form of tulips and roses.
How beautiful, O God! must have been some of the faces
that lie hidden in the dust!

This is echoed by Forster in Chapter 9 of *A Passage to India*, when Aziz recites poetry to his friends: 'Whatever Ghalib had felt, he had anyhow lived in India, and this consolidated it for them: he had gone with his own tulips and roses, but tulips and roses do not go.'

In his article, Masood remarked: '... with us in the East, poetry is still a living force, and we are not ashamed of giving vent to the emotions it evokes'.

Page 164 *In similar manner, writing to James Kirkup (6 May 1942) about some remarks of Eliot's on Virginia Woolf, Forster complained: 'I lose all patience with him when he starts guarding himself.' He also disapproved of Eliot's reverence for pain. In 1963, after reading Eliot's 'Little Gidding' aloud to himself, he wrote in his Commonplace Book:

I feel now to be as far ahead of him [Eliot] as I was once behind. Always a distance – and a respectful one. How I dislike his homage to pain! What animal except the human could have excogitated it? Of course there's pain on and off through each individual life, and pain at the end of most lives. You can't shirk it and so on. But why should it be endorsed by the school-master and sanctified by the priest until

the fire and the rose are one

when so much of it is caused by disease or by bullies? It is here that Eliot becomes unsatisfactory as a seer, as Coventry does as a shrine. That misfire-cathedral has given Christ a green face and the Angel of the Agony matches for legs.

Despite this, he thought 'Little Gidding' a 'wonderful' poem.

Eliot admired Forster's 1929 essay on himself ('T. S. Eliot and his Difficulties') and wrote Forster a very interesting letter in acknowledging it (10 August 1929). He congratulated Forster on detecting the 'bluff' in his prose-style, but told him he exaggerated the relevance of the War to 'The Waste Land', which might have been just the same had there been no war.

Page 186 *Kidd read an article by A. P. Herbert in the *Week End Review* (5 August 1933), about the activities of police *agents provocateurs* against after-hours' drinking in night-clubs. Herbert's sanctimonious tone annoyed him, and he challenged Herbert, as the 'champion' of freedom, to protest at – what he thought an infinitely more serious evil – the use of *agents provocateurs* against the Hunger Marchers. Herbert rose to the challenge. There were various published exchanges between them in the *Week End Review*, and eventually A. P. Herbert offered, if Kidd would swear an affidavit against the police, to go with Gerald Barry (the editor of the *Week End Review*) to the Commissioner of Metropolitan Police, Lord Trenchard, to demand a public inquiry into the use of *agents provocateurs*. The deputation duly took place; Trenchard responded with a written statement denying the need for an enquiry; and in the October 28 number of the *Week End Review* A. P. Herbert wrote pointing out inconsistencies in Trenchard's statement and warmly praising Kidd for his public spirit in raising the whole issue. It was out of these events that the N.C.C.L. took shape.

Page 187 *It was a bitterly cold day, and, according to Claud Cockburn, H. G. Wells, who had been ill, suddenly dug his umbrella into the mud of Hyde Park, exclaiming: 'I refuse to go any further. I detect your plan. At any moment now, as a result of some prearranged signal on your part, the situation will get out of hand, the police will charge, a dozen prominent authors and legislators will be borne to the ground, and you will have the

incident you desire.' It struck Cockburn, who had not previously thought of it, as quite a good idea. (See C. Cockburn, *In Time of Trouble* (1956), pp. 241-2.)

Page 187 *Robert Skidelsky, in his *Oswald Mosley* (1975) p. 357, quotes a report from the police Special Branch asserting that in 1934 (when Kidd was writing to the *New Statesman* that his Council 'expressed no opinion' as to the desirability of anti-fascist demonstrations) 'the activities of the N.C.C.L. were directed, via Kidd, from Communist Party headquarters'. Sylvia Scaffardi, Kidd's close associate at this period, denied this strongly in conversation with the present author in 1977. She said that Kidd was never a Communist or a member of any political party. There was, she said, some contact between the Council and the Communist Party headquarters on the matter of providing observers to cover meetings and demonstrations. She herself had twice visited their headquarters for this purpose. (Mrs Scaffardi has given a long and interesting account of the early days of the N.C.C.L. in her – so far unpublished – autobiography.)

Page 190 *It was, however, invoked in a major trial in December 1975, when fourteen members of the British Withdrawal From Northern Ireland movement were accused of conspiring to incite soldiers to desert and of being in possession of seditious leaflets. Their acquittal was hailed by the N.C.C.L. as a vindication of their long campaign against the Act

Page 226 *As Samuel Hynes puts it in *The Auden Generation* (1976): '... Auden and Isherwood recognized that the war in China was different – that in its scale, its confusion, its huge destruction of cities and people, it was the war that was coming. And so the two young men travelled half-way round the world, not to report a war, and certainly not to participate in it, but to testify how they felt in the presence of war, and what meaning the experience had for them.'

Page 237 *They met once more, in 1960, at a party at the Savoy Hotel, when Joe Ackerley was receiving the W. H. Smith Literary Award for his novel *We Think the World of You*. Daley told Forster that he was writing his memoirs, but that Forster was not to worry: he (Harry) had become discreet in his old age, to which Forster replied, amicably, that he could say what he liked: he (Forster) had become indiscreet in his old age. Daley's memoirs, 'This Small Cloud' – a remarkable book, so far unpublished – were, as he had promised, entirely discreet and made hardly any mention of his literary friends.

Page 238 *See *Hansard* 13 June 1940: 'Major Sir Jocelyn Lucas asked the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Labour whether British citizens of military age, such as Mr. W. H. Auden and Mr. Christopher Isherwood, who have gone to the United States and expressed their

determination not to return to this country until war is over, will be summoned back for registration and calling up, in view of the fact that they are seeking refuge abroad?

Mr. Assheton I have no information with regard to Mr. Isherwood. Mr. Austin gave an undertaking before leaving the country that he would return if called upon to do so, he is outside the age groups so far required to register under the National Service (armed Forces) Act.

Mr. Mathers On a point of Order. There is no mention of Mr. Austin in this Question.

Sir J. Lucas Is my hon. Friend aware of the indignation caused by young men leaving the country and saying that they will not fight? If they are not registered as conscientious objectors will he see that they lose their citizenship?

Page 280 *Harry Daley, who was still friendly with Ackerley, was caustic on the subject of Queenie. He wrote to the author (24 November 1968): 'In no time Joe turned the Dog into a noisy, dangerous creature that rushed about barking and made conversation impossible, and was too hysterical to stand still for even the rooth of a second for me to take the photograph Joe so much wanted. Although Joe, shouting at the bloody thing to be quiet, made almost as much noise as the Dog, and had endless abusive exchanges with bus conductors (some of whom got bit on the bum) who refused to carry the Dog, to say nothing of neighbours complaining and police calling with warnings, he was convinced that he and his dog were the envy and admiration of the whole of Putney . . . Joe put up this act, any dog would have served, and he squeezed every ounce of pleasure from it. It was a good exhibition with in my opinion, about as little to do with sex or love as Joe's previous "love affairs" with human beings.'

Page 291 *There were George Richmond drawings of Marianne Thornton, of Forster's aunts Ella and Edith Forster and of his grandfather Charles Forster. Elsewhere in the room were a painting of his great-great-aunt Marianne Sykes in Turkish costume, by Sir George Chalmers; an engraving of Gainsborough's portrait said to be of Henry Thornton but actually of Henry's father John; an engraving of Richmond's portrait of Wilberforce, a drawing by his great-aunt Lucy Thornton of 'Interior of Holy Trinity Church, Clapham Common' (c. 1825); etc.

Page 300 *In October 1953 a Police Court magistrate was reported (inaccurately) as saying that in his court alone more than 600 cases of homosexual importuning were tried every year. Reacting to this, the Liberal statesman Viscount Samuel, in a speech in the Lords (4 November 1953) on 'the moral state of the nation', said that, in addition to increased juvenile crime and growing laxity over adultery, 'the vices of Sodom and Gomorrah, of the Cities of the Plain, appear to be rife among us.' He blamed the weakening of the moral law on the two world wars and on 'strange

new doctrines in physiology and psychology' and foresaw retribution, 'not in earthquake or conflagration but in something much more deadly, an insidious poisoning of the moral sense.'

Forster had commented on the same report in an article 'Society and the Homosexual: a Magistrate's Figures' in the *New Statesman* for 31 October 1953, asking, if not for change in the law for homosexuals (which he thought unlikely for many years), at least for 'less social stigma under the existing law'. He sent a copy of his article to Lord Samuel, who replied (29 November 1953) that he was 'far from quarrelling with its general tendency' but concluded, 'If homosexuality between adults is legalized, is it not likely that it may become very widespread, possibly catered for by brothels of a special type? Incomprehensible and utterly disgusting as it appears to all normal people, it seems to have the capacity to form a habit as potent as alcohol or narcotics.'

Page 305 *For the occasion Siegfried Sassoon sent him a poem, written on the back of a photograph of King's chapel with a collage of Forster's head in the west window. It ran:

In bygone days I sometimes sauced a
Confederate crony – Morgan Forster.
Query: do I now dare accost a
Figure as famed as E. M. Forster?
I do. In bed with glum lumbago
Watch I my words upon their way go.
And wafted by affectionate wings,
Join the glad 'goings on' at King's.

With Morgan I can still be 'matey'
Though grown so eminent at eighty.
I, ever most unintellectual,
And as a thinker, ineffectual,
I, a believer in believing,
Can hail his genius for perceiving
Reasoned humanities which led
Where angels have not feared to tread,
And thus, forbearing further fuss,
Award my friend an Alpha Plus.

Forster, in copying it into his Commonplace Book, wrote: 'Lovely skilful sincere stuff and illustrating that "I love you though I never trouble to see you" attitude which is also characteristic of Ben and Peter, and which I do not share.'

Appendix:

The Maharaja of Dewas (Sir Tukoji Rao III)

His marriage-troubles

The early marital troubles of the Maharaja of Dewas were obscure and complicated, involving political rivalries between him and his fellow Mahratta princes, the Maharaja of Kolhapur and the Gaekwar of Baroda, and manoeuvres on the part of all of them *vis-à-vis* the British. Soon after the marriage-alliance with Kolhapur had been arranged in 1907, the Gaekwar of Baroda, a relative of Tukoji's and one of the most powerful princes in India, had tried to persuade Tukoji to marry his own daughter instead, or even (for it was embarrassing for her still to be unmarried at 16) to take her as a supplementary wife. Tukoji had refused, and he and his bride-elect were married in Kolhapur in March 1908, the ceremony being performed with great pomp, though among quarrels and sinister rumours – such as that the bride would be put to death five days after the ceremony, as a sacrifice to avert plague and famine, and the bridegroom would go out of his mind. (Malcolm Darling, who attended the wedding with his sisters, gives a lengthy account of it in *Apprentice to Power* [1966].) The ceremony performed, however, Tukoji discovered to his chagrin that for another two years he was not to be allowed to live with his bride (who was then 14) or even to see her. He protested, but a committee of ladies of the Palace upheld the ruling; and, by now thoroughly overwrought, he fell into a dangerous fever, being nursed through it devotedly by Malcolm Darling.

In a way the marriage never went right after this. The bride and bridegroom managed to meet unofficially (the ban on their doing so seems to have been a sort of ritual prohibition, intended to be

flouted), and in October 1908, in a further ceremony, the consummation of the marriage was proclaimed and Tukoji brought the Rani back to Dewas. Within a few months, however, there was a quarrel. The Rani suspected an affair between him and one of her maids-of-honour and returned in dudgeon to Kolhapur for a stay of many months. She was by now pregnant, and in May 1909 she gave birth to a son (Vikramsinha), but when Tukoji went to see them, she still appeared implacably – and by now rather mysteriously – indifferent and hostile. The affair was prejudicing Tukoji's whole standing at Kolhapur, and he retaliated by refusing to see the child.

Eventually, after his return to Dewas, a letter arrived from the Rani which partly explained the mystery. According to her, her aunt, a Baroda woman, had told her that Tukoji was plotting with Baroda to have her poisoned and to marry the Gaekwar's daughter in her place. The Rani had asked why, even, if he intended the marriage, he should need to murder her, to which her aunt had replied that he was afraid of the Maharaja of Kolhapur – not on the latter's own account but because of his influence with the British. The Rani, in her letter, asked Tukoji how much of the story was true, saying that even if it were all true she would rather die than 'be protected by this bad woman', and Tukoji (so he reported to Malcolm Darling) replied swearing total innocence, 'on all oaths and in a most vivid manner', and threatening to kill himself unless she believed him.

Matters were now patched up between them, and the Rani returned to Dewas; but before long there were further disputes, leading, in 1915, to a permanent separation. Meanwhile, in March 1912, on a visit to Kolhapur, Tukoji had met and fallen in love with Bai Saheba, a family dependant of the Maharaja of Kolhapur, then 14 years of age and about to be trained as a dancing-girl. He brought her back to Dewas and (according to his later account to Darling) married her in April by the so-called 'Third form of marriage'.

The young prince's flight and later scandals.

The events of 1927–28, when the young prince Vikramsinha took flight from Dewas, evidently had their origins in the troubles just described. The story of the flight, and what led up to it, is intensely confused, quite different versions emerging from Josie Darling's

letters,¹ the A.G.G.'s correspondence with the Political Department² and the Maharaja of Kolhapur's letter to Government House, Bombay.² (For instance, it was part of the story that reached official ears that Tukoji had sent armed men to ambush the escaping prince and that they had opened fire on the prince's car. Josie Darling, however (in a letter to her son, 11 January 1928) explained the matter thus:

Vikram one day motored over the border, at the Sipra river, and informed the loyal Sirdar, who was sitting beside him, that he was going to leave Dewas for ever. The Sirdar had a revolver. Sharman, from the back seat, cried 'Give me the pistol, quick! I will fire at the tyres and prevent his going.' Silly old Sirdar gave him it. Sharman rapidly fired 4 shots at the mudguard on Vikky's side. Then they sped to the Residency, said Uncle Tukki [i.e. Tukoji] had posted men in ambush to kill Vikky – behold the bullet marks!)

One thing is clear, it was at this moment that Tukoji lost the confidence of the British, with results fatal to himself. It so happened that the two British officials most closely concerned with Tukoji's later history were brothers, Sir Reginald and Sir Bertram Glancy. Sir Reginald, a personal friend of Tukoji's, was A.G.G. at Indore at the time of the young prince's flight and acted with great good will, doing everything he could to reconcile the father and son and to minimize the public scandal. He was, however, finally alienated by Tukoji's behaviour: by his vacillation and tortuousness, his insistence that there should be no inquiry, and his unforgiveness towards his son. He began to doubt Tukoji's good faith, and probably passed on his doubts to his younger brother Sir Bertram, who was Political Secretary and 'right-hand man' to the Viceroy.

In the later stages of the Dewas drama – the British attempt to impose officials and advisers on Tukoji, Tukoji's fantastic flight to Pondicherry, and his eventual deposition in favour of his son – Sir Bertram had the deciding voice, and his attitude to Tukoji was throughout cold and hostile. In 1932 Tukoji, who was ill, called in an old friend of his, a retired army surgeon named Sir James Roberts, to help him with the State's affairs. A colleague of Sir Bertram

¹ Now in the possession of Malcolm Darling's daughter, Mme April van Biervliet.

² In the India Office Library.

Appendix

Glancy's in the Political Department – though urging Sir James to accept the help of a government adviser – reported that Sir James must be allowed to stay for some time, otherwise the Maharaja would 'certainly crash'. Glancy, on the other hand, did his best to get Sir James removed ('His activities in India states have never been of benefit to anyone but himself'), and he blocked the appointment of any successor – pronouncing Malcolm Darling, whose name was suggested, undesirable and to be 'as gullible as Sir James Roberts'.

Early in 1935, a year or more after Tukoji's removal to Pondicherry, Malcolm Darling was still making heroic efforts to help him, offering to act as his plenipotentiary in negotiations with the *Raj* and at the same time pleading with him, for the sake of his own peace of mind, to accept his fate and to return to his country as a private citizen. While in Delhi, Darling asked Sir Bertram Glancy for an interview about Tukoji's affairs, but Sir Bertram refused to see him, granting him no more than a lengthy telephone conversation. It was his attitude that caused Forster, in *The Hill of Devi*, to speak of the British handling of Tukoji as 'impeccably right and absolutely wrong'.

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